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THE

WORKS

OF

DR. JOHN TILLOTSON,

LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

WITH THE LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY

THO^{s}. BIRCH, M.A.

ALSO,

A COPIOUS INDEX, AND THE TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE CAREFULLY COMPARED.

IN TEN VOLUMES.—VOL. VI.

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SERMONS.

SERMON CXVII.

THE PREJUDICES AGAINST CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.—MATT. xi. 6.

I HAVE from these words* propounded to consider two things.

I. Those prejudices and objections which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at their first appearance; as also to inquire into those which men at this day do more especially insist upon, against the Christian religion; and to shew the unreasonableness of them.

II. How happy a thing it is to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men have against religion.

I have entered upon the first of these; the prejudices which the world had against our Saviour and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from God, though he gave all imaginable testimony and evidence that he was sent from heaven, yet the greatest part of the world, both Jews and gentiles, were mightily offended at him, and deeply

* See Sermon CXVI. Vol. V. p. 554.

prejudiced against him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the Jews made against our Saviour and his doctrine, and have shewn the unreasonableness of them.

I proceed now to consider the principal of those exceptions, which the gentiles and heathen philosophers took at our Saviour and his doctrine. I shall mention these four:

First, That Christianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world.

Secondly, They objected against the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, That it wanted demonstration.

Fourthly, That the low and suffering condition of our Saviour was unsuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and reformer of the world. These are the chief exceptions which the heathen, and especially their philosophers, took at our Saviour and his doctrine.

First, That the Christian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world; and consequently that it did condemn the religion which had been so universally received and established in the world by so long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impression upon them, and raised a mighty prejudice in the minds of men against the Christian religion; no prejudices being so strong as those that are fixed in the minds of men by education: and of all the prejudices of education, none so violent and hard to be removed, as those about re-

ligion; yea, though they be never so groundless and unreasonable. "Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?" Intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how absurd soever it be. When Christianity was first propounded to the heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepossessed with other apprehensions of God and religion, it might then have been expected from them, that they should have entertained it with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reasonableness of it. But the case was quite otherwise; the world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worship, and inured to rites and superstitions of a quite different nature. And this sways very much with men; *Sequimur majores nostros, qui feliciter sequuti sunt suos;* as one of the heathens said in those days; "We follow our ancestors, who happily followed theirs." Men are hardly brought to condemn those opinions and customs in religion, which themselves and their forefathers have always embraced and followed. And wise men especially are loath to admit so great a change in a matter of so great concernment as religion is. So that this must be acknowledged to have been a considerable prejudice against the Christian religion at its first appearance. But yet, upon a thorough examination, this will not be found sufficient in reason to withhold men from embracing Christianity, if we consider these four things:

1. No prudent person thinks that the example and custom of his forefathers obligeth him to that which is evil in itself, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, no danger, equal to that of a false religion; for that tends to the ruin of

men's souls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better allege the example of his forefathers to justify his errors and follies in any other kind than in this, which is so infinitely pernicious in the consequences of it.

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no sufficient reason against a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiss, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wisest among the heathens did acknowledge that their religion was mixed with very great follies and superstitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extremely corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavoured, as much as they could, and durst, to reform these things. And therefore there was no reason to oppose an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, though it be usually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be desired and wished for.

3. The change which Christianity designed, was the least liable to exception that could be, being nothing else, in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to such apprehensions of God, and such a way of worshipping him, as was most suitable to the Divine nature, and to the natural notions of men's minds; nothing else but a design to persuade men of the one true God, maker of the world, that he is a Spirit, and to be worshipped in such a manner as is suitable to his spiritual nature. And then, for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of those precepts of temperance, and justice, and charity, which had been universally acknowledged, even by the heathens themselves, to be the great duties which men

owe to themselves and others. And that this is the main design of the Christian religion, the apostle hath told us in most plain express words: (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) "The grace of God (that is, the doctrine of the gospel) which hath appeared to all men, and brings salvation, teacheth us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world."

And all that the Christian religion adds beyond this, are means and helps for our direction, and assistance, and encouragement in the discharge and performance of these duties. For our direction, God hath sent his Son in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern and example of holiness and virtue. For our assistance, he hath promised the aids of his Holy Spirit; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of sin in the blood of his Son, and eternal life and happiness in another world. This is a short sum and abridgment of the Christian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reasonably be excepted against.

4. God, considering the prejudice of the heathen against Christianity, by reason of their education in a contrary religion, was strong and violent, was pleased to give such evidence of the truth of Christianity, as was of proportionable strength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleased to give testimony to the first founder of this religion, by mighty miracles, and particularly by his resurrection from the dead; but because the report of these things was only brought to the heathen world, and they had not seen these things themselves; therefore, he enabled those who were the witnesses of these things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they

saw those who gave testimony to our Saviour's miracles, do as great and strange things themselves, as they testified of him, there was no reason any longer to doubt of the truth of their testimony. So that though the prejudice of the heathen against Christianity was very great, yet the evidence which God gave to it was strong enough to remove it. The doctrine of Christianity was such as might have recommended itself to impartial men, by its own reasonableness: but meeting with violent prejudices in those to whom it was offered, God was pleased to give such a confirmation to it as was sufficient to bear down those prejudices.

Secondly, Another objection against Christianity was the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine. They expected some deep speculations in natural or moral philosophy; they made full account, a teacher sent from heaven would have instructed them in the profoundest points, and discoursed to them about the first principles of things, and the nature of the soul, and the chief end of man, with a subtilty and eloquence infinitely beyond that of their greatest sophisters, and able to bear down all opposition and contradiction: but, instead of this, they are told a plain story of the life and miracles of Jesus Christ, and of his dying upon the cross, and rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this delivered without any ornaments of art, or insinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applause of those to whom they related these things.

But now this, truly considered, is so far from being any real objection against the Christian doctrine, that it is one of the greatest commendations that can be given of it: for matter of fact ought to be

related in the most plain and simple and unaffected manner; and the less art and eloquence is used in the telling of a story, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our Saviour's precepts, how plain soever they might be, I am sure they are a collection of the most excellent and reasonable rules of a good life, and the freest from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him, than so plain and useful a doctrine as this? The language of the law is not wont to be fine and persuasive, but short, and plain, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: and surely it is much fitter for God to speak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, It is objected, that the doctrine of our Saviour and his apostles wanted demonstration; they seemed to impose too much upon the understandings of men, and to deliver things too magisterially, not demonstrating things from intrinsical arguments, but requiring belief and assent without proof.

This the apostle St. Paul readily acknowledgeth, that, in preaching the gospel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen orators and philosophers. (1 Cor. ii. 4.) "My speech and my preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wisdom: but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;" that is, they did not go in the way of human eloquence and demonstration; but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonstration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, nor to entangle their minds by subtle reasonings, the force of which very few are capable of: but they offered to men a sensible proof and demonstration of the truth of what they deli-

vered, in those strange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the Holy Ghost. And this was a sensible evidence, even to the meanest capacity, of a Divine assistance going along with them, and giving testimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and his ascending into heaven, be not a clearer demonstration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the finest and subtilest arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the soul, its power of reflection upon itself, and independency upon the body as to some of its operations; which yet are some of the chiefest arguments that philosophy affords to prove the immortality of our souls.

Fourthly, The heathens objected, that the low and mean condition of our Saviour was unsuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by God to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This, to the heathen philosophers, did not only appear unreasonable, but even ridiculous. So St. Paul tells us: (1 Cor. i. 23.) "We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" to think that a man who appeared in such mean circumstances should be fit to reform the world; and one, who himself was put to death, should be relied upon for life and immortality.

This objection I have heretofore considered at large, and therefore shall now speak but very briefly to it.

Besides those excellent reasons and ends which the Scripture assigns of our Saviour's humiliation: as, that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our sins; that by

suffering himself he might learn to commiserate us; that "by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lives subject to bondage;" I say, besides these, it was of great use that he should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride, and vanity, and fantastry of the world, and to convince men of these two great truths—that God may love those whom he afflicts; and, that men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midst of poverty, and reproach, and suffering. Had our blessed Saviour been a great temporal prince, his influence and example might possibly have made more hypocrites and servile converts; but would not have persuaded men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great arguments which must do that, must be fetched, not from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the eternal happiness and misery of the other. Besides, had he appeared in any great power and splendour, the Christian religion could not have been so clearly acquitted from the suspicion of a worldly interest and design, which would have been a far greater objection against it, than this which I am now speaking to.

Add to all this, that the wisest of the heathen philosophers did teach, that worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but despised by a truly wise man; that men may be virtuous, and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miseries and sufferings; and that whoever suffers unjustly, and bears it patiently, gives the greatest testimony to goodness, and does most effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man under the hardest circumstances of misery, and re-

proach, and suffering, is the fittest person of all other to be the minister, and apostle, and preacher of God to mankind; and surely they who say such things (which the heathens have done) had no reason to object to our blessed Saviour, his low and suffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he, who promised immortality to others, could not save himself from death and suffering: considering that he, who was put to death, rescued himself from the power of the grave; it is so far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reasonable, than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who, by rising from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonstration that he was able to make good what he promised.

I have done with the exceptions which were made against our Saviour and his doctrine at their first appearance in the world. I proceed, in the

Second place, To consider the prejudices and objections which men at this day do more especially insist upon, against our Saviour and his religion; and they are many.

First, Some that relate to the incarnation of our Saviour.

Secondly, To the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, That we have not now sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity; the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this distance, we have not, nor can be expected to have, sufficient assurance.

Fourthly, That the terms of it seem very hard, and to lay too great restraints upon human nature.

Fifthly, That it is apt to dispirit men, and to break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly, The divisions and factions that are among Christians.

Seventhly, The wicked lives of the greatest part of the professors of Christianity. In answer to all which, I do not propose to say all that may be said, but as briefly as I can to offer so much, as may, if not give full satisfaction, yet be sufficient to break the force of them, and to free the minds of men from any great perplexity about them.

As to the first, which relates to the incarnation of our Saviour; and the second, to the time of his appearance ; I know that these, and most of the rest I have mentioned, were urged by the heathen against Christianity: but they are now more especially insisted on, both by the secret and open enemies of our religion.

The objections against his incarnation I have elsewhere considered.* And therefore shall proceed to the next; viz.

Secondly, As to the time of our Saviour's appearance, it is objected, if he be the only way and means of salvation, why did he come no sooner into the world ; but suffer mankind to remain so long without any hopes or means of being saved? this was objected by Porphyry of old, and still sticks in the minds of men. To this I answer,

1. It is not fit for creatures to call their Creator to too strict an account of his actions. Goodness is free, and may act when and how it pleaseth ; and as "God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy," so he may have mercy at what time he pleaseth, and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the atheist against the being of God ; that if there were such an infinite and eternal Being he would surely have

* See Sermon XLV. on John i. 14. Vol. iii. p. 339.

made the world sooner, and not have been without all employment for so long a duration; such another objection is this against our Saviour, that, if he had been the Son of God, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind sooner, and not have delayed it so long, and suffered mankind to perish for four thousand years together.

But it seems, in the one as well as the other, God took his own time, and he best knew what time was fittest. The Scripture tells us, that, "in the fulness of time, God sent his Son:" when things were ripe for it, and all things accomplished that God thought requisite in order to it. In judging of the actions of our earthly governors, those who are at a distance from their counsels, what conjectures soever they may make of the reasons of them, will nevertheless, if they have that respect for their wisdom which they ought, believe, that how strange soever some of their actions may seem, yet they were done upon good reason, and that they themselves, if they knew the secrets of their counsels, should think so. Much more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wisdom of God, to believe that the counsels of his will are grounded upon very good reason, though we do not see many times what it is.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly destitute of a way and means of salvation before our Saviour's coming. Before the law of Moses was given, men were capable of being received to the mercy and favour of God, upon their obedience to the law of nature, and their sincere repentance for the violation of it, by virtue of "the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." Men were saved by Christ, both before and under the law, without

any particular and express knowledge of him. There were good men in other nations, as well as among the Jews, as Job, and his friends also, seem to have been. In all ages of the world, and "in every nation, they that feared God and wrought righteousness were accepted of him." The sacrifice of Christ, which is the meritorious cause of the salvation of mankind, looks back as well as forward; and God was reconcilable to men, and their sins were pardoned, by virtue of this great propitiation that was to be made. In which sense, perhaps, it is, that Christ is said to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Heb. ix. 25, 26.) The apostle intimates to us, that if this sacrifice, which was offered in the last ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, "Christ must have often suffered since the foundation of the world; but now hath he appeared once in the conclusion of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

3. He did appear at that time in which the world stood most in need of him; when the whole world, both Jews and gentiles, were sunk into the greatest degeneracy both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind seemed to be even desperate and past remedy. This was the needful time, when it was most seasonable for this great physician to come, and shew his pity and his skill in our recovery. God could have sent his Son many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways first, and to reserve this powerful remedy to the last; "last of all he sent his Son."

4. The time of our Saviour's appearing was of all ages of the world the fittest season for his coming; whether we consider,

1. That the world was at that time best pre-

pared and disposed for receiving the Christian religion: or,

2. That this was the fittest season that ever had been, for the easy diffusing and propagating of this religion. I assign these reasons as tending to give men some satisfaction, why this great blessing was delayed so long; it being rather an argument of wisdom and goodness, than of the want of either, to defer things to that time, in which they are most likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reasons may be given. To be sure, God had very good reasons for this dispensation, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time, these seem not to be altogether inconsiderable:

1. That the world was at that time best prepared and disposed for receiving the Christian religion. All the while our Saviour's coming was delayed, God's providence was disposing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great blessing. The Jewish religion was always very burdensome, but much more so towards the expiration of the Jewish state; partly by the intolerable multitude of external observances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretence of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reason of their subjection to the Romans, which made the exercise of their religion, in many respects, more difficult.

And the heathen world was in a very good measure prepared for Christianity, by being civilized. About the time of our Saviour's coming into the world, philosophy and learning had been so diffused by the Roman conquests, as had brought a great part of the world from barbarism to civility. Besides that, their philosophy had this effect upon

men, to refine their reason, and, in a good degree, to detect the follies of the heathen idolatry and superstition.

It is true, indeed, learning and philosophy flourished a great while before, in the time of the Grecian empire, and, perhaps, before that in some other nations; and the conquests of the Grecians were very speedy and of vast extent: but yet they were neither so universal, nor so well settled; nor did they propagate their philosophy and civility together with their conquests, as the Romans did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were so generally prepared and disposed for the receiving of the gospel, as that wherein our Saviour appeared.

2. This was likewise the fittest season for the easy diffusing and propagating of the Christian religion. The Romans, together with their conquests, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more easy; and by the long and frequent correspondence of the several parts of that empire one with another, the ways of travel and passage from one country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be instanced, in all respects so convenient for the speedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our Saviour appeared; viz. when the Roman empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodness and wisdom of the Divine Providence, that the bravest and most virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the Persians or Grecians) should be chosen by God, as one of the chiefest means for the spreading of the best and most perfect revelation that ever God made to the world.

Thirdly, It is objected, that we have not now sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity, the

main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this distance, we have not, nor can be supposed to have, sufficient assurance. To this I answer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted assurance of matters of fact, ancienter than these we are speaking of; and the distance of them from our times creates no manner of scruple in the minds of men concerning them. That there was such a man as Alexander the Great, and that he conquered Darius and the Persians; that Julius Cæsar invaded our nation, and in some measure subdued it; and that he overcame Pompey in the battle of Pharsalia; and innumerable other things which I might instance in, that were done before our Saviour's time, are firmly believed without any manner of doubt and scruple by mankind, notwithstanding they were done so long ago. So that ancient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have sufficient assurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the passion or prejudice of those to whom it is proposed.

2. We have every whit as great assurance (nay, greater if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of Christianity relies, as of those which I have mentioned. The matters of fact, upon which the truth of Christianity relies, are, that there was such a person as Jesus Christ; that he wrought such miracles; that he was put to death at Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate; that he rose again from the dead, and was visibly taken up into heaven; that he bestowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the apostles, to make them competent witnesses of his resurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine, which they published in his name; that

accordingly they preached the gospel to the world, and in a short space, without any human advantages, did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it, in most parts of the then known world.

Now, these matters of fact have the same testimony of histories, wrote in those times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontrolled a tradition, as the conquests of Alexander and Julius Cæsar. So that, if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a sign that we have some prejudice or interest against the one more than against the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go farther, that the evidence for these things, which are the foundation of Christianity, is so much the greater, because that which depended upon it was of far greater concernment to the world, and consequently mankind were more obliged to search more narrowly into it.

For our Saviour's life, and death, and resurrection, we have the testimony of a great number of eye-witnesses, who have wrote the history of these things. And though they were truly extraordinary persons, and gave testimony to themselves by miracles; yet, at present, I desire no more, but that they be looked upon as knowing and honest relators of what they heard and saw; and that the same credit be given to them, which we give to Livy, and Arrian, and Q. Curtius, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I must add withal, that, besides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater testimony of their integrity, than any historian in the world ever did. For they willingly suffered the greatest persecution and torment, yea, and death itself, in confirmation of the truth of what they delivered. And for the propagating of the Christian religion

through so great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of Christianity does depend, here is greater and more advantageous evidence of history, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatsoever.

3. As to the substance of these matters of fact, we have the concurring testimony of the greatest enemies of the Christian religion. That there were such persons as our Saviour and his apostles, that they preached such a doctrine, that they wrought such miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the Jews, and the testimony of the heathen historians, and particularly Celsus, and Porphyry, and Julian, who were the particular and most learned adversaries of the Christian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection against them, whatever use we may make of them, or whatever consequences we may draw from them. And I presume it agreed by all objectors, that, if these matters of fact be true, they are a sufficient foundation of the truth of our religion; and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of these things, which the greatest enemies of Christianity never had the face to deny.

4. And besides all this, to recompense the disadvantage which we have of those who saw the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles, we have the *testimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of these things, to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the first ages of Christianity could not have. We see our Saviour's predictions of the success of his religion in the world, in the propagating and establishing of it, fully accomplished, notwithstanding the fierce opposition and resistance

that was made against it by the greatest powers of the world. We see the dispersion of the Jews in all nations, and the misery and contempt which they every where suffer; and that now, for above sixteen hundred years, they have continued a distinct people, and a spectacle of the Divine justice and severity, for rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, and for a lasting and standing testimony of the truth of our Saviour's prediction, and of the Christian religion.

So that, though we live at this distance from the first rise and beginning of Christianity, yet we have the relation of those things, which give confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner, as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of things remaining to this day, do give testimony of the truth of it.

Fourthly, It is objected, that the terms of Christianity seem very hard, and to lay too great restraints upon human nature. It commands us to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and "deny ungodliness, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world: to be holy in all manner of conversation; to have respect to whatever things are honest, and true, and just, and virtuous, and of good report; and to deny ourselves;" and to part with the dearest enjoyments of this life, "yea, and with life itself, for the sake of Christ, and his gospel." Now these seem to be very hard terms; to forego all the present pleasures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happiness which we are less assured of.

To this I answer,

1. That this is a greater objection against religion in general, than the Christian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that

Christianity does, and gives us far less assurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and justice, and charity, the due government of our appetites and passions, as well as Christianity does; but does not discover to us the rewards of another world, by many degrees, so clearly, as our Lord and Saviour, who hath "brought life and immortality to light by the gospel;" and by his resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, hath given us full assurance of another life after this, and of a glorious immortality. So that though we have not, nor can have, the evidence of sense, for a future state, yet we have all the rational evidence for it, that can be wished or expected; and much more than men have for those adventures of their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make in this world, and think themselves reasonable in so doing.

2. The restraints which Christianity lays upon men, are, in the judgment of mankind, so far from being an objection against it, that they are highly to the commendation of it. Nay, it were the greatest objection that could be against our religion, if it did set us at liberty from those restraints. What can be more to the credit of any religion, than to command men to be just, and charitable, and peaceable? and what more to the advantage of the professors of it? and, on the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion, than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to these? It shews men are glad to make any thing an objection against Christianity, when they lay hold of that, which, if it had been otherwise, they would have made ten times more clamour against it for the contrary.

3. As for most of those restraints which Christ-

ianity lays upon us, they are of that nature, so much both for our private and public advantage, that, setting aside all considerations of religion, and of the rewards and punishments of another life, they are really good for us; and if God had not laid them upon us, we ought, in reason, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon ourselves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have such strong and forcible obligations to these duties; but yet, I say, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health, and quiet, and reputation, and safety, in a word, to the private and public prosperity of mankind, that men should be temperate, and chaste, and just, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging, to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create those restraints arbitrarily, but requires those things of us, which our reason, and a regard to our advantage, which the necessity and conveniency of the things themselves, without any consideration of religion, would in most cases urge us to.

4. As to the case of persecution for religion; besides that it does not now happen so frequently as it did in the beginning of Christianity, nay, very seldom, in comparison, if all things be considered, it cannot be thought unreasonable; both because religion offers to us, in consideration of our present sufferings, a happiness unspeakably greater than that which we forego for the sake of religion; and because, when it happens, God does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we see in the examples of the primitive Christians; who, in great numbers of all tempers and ages, did voluntarily choose to give up them-

selves to these sufferings, when there was no necessity laid upon them, but fair terms of retreat were offered to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man suffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid suffering. In the former case, men submit to necessity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter case, if men suffer, it is a sign they firmly believe the reward of it; and, if they suffer cheerfully, and with joy, as most of the martyrs did, it is a plain evidence that God affords them extraordinary support in their sufferings; and then the case is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing but what it gives them cause, and enables them, to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, It is objected that the Christian religion is apt to dispirit men, and to break the courage and vigour of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekness, and forgiving injuries, and the like. This objection hath made a great noise in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep insight into the tempers of men, and affairs of the world. It is said to be particularly insisted upon by Machiavel, and very likely it may, though I think that elsewhere he is pleased to speak with terms of respect, not only of religion in general, but likewise of the Christian religion; and (which seems very much to contradict the other) he says, in the first book of his discourses upon Livy, (chap. 11.) that the greatness and success of Rome is chiefly to be ascribed to their piety and religion; and that Rome was more indebted to Numa Pompilius for settling religion among them, than to Romulus, the founder of their state; and the reason he gives is much to our present pur-

pose; for, says he, without religion there can be no military discipline; religion being the foundation of good laws and good discipline. And particularly he commends the Samnites, who betook themselves to religion, as their last and best remedy to make men courageous, nothing being more apt to raise men's spirits than religion.

But howsoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reason and experience for the confutation of it.

1. To reason, and that as to these two things:

(1.) That the Christian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greatest resolution and truest courage. It teacheth men, upon the best and most rational grounds, to despise dangers, yea, and death itself, the greatest and most formidable evil in this world; and this principle is likely to inspire men with the greatest courage; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is nothing in this world to be feared? And this the Christian religion does, by giving men the assurance of another life, and a happiness infinitely greater than any that is to be enjoyed in this world. And, in order to the securing of this happiness, it teacheth men to be holy and just, and to exercise a good conscience both toward God and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. "This makes the righteous man" to be (as Solomon says) "bold as a lion." Nothing renders a man more undaunted as to death, and the consequences of it, than the peace of his own mind; for a man not to be conscious to himself of having wilfully displeased Him, who alone can make us happy or miserable in the other

world. So that a good man, being secure of the favour of God, may, upon that account, reasonably hope for a greater happiness after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be sober, and have his senses awakened to a serious consideration of things, cannot but be afraid to die, and be extremely anxious and solicitous what will become of him in another world. And surely it would make the stoutest man breathing afraid to venture upon death when he sees hell beyond it. Possibly there may be some monsters of men who may have so far suppressed the sense of religion, and stupified their consciences, as, in a good measure, to have conquered the fears of death, and of the consequences of it. But this happens but to a very few, as the poet tells us in the person of an Epicurean:

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.

There are very few that attain to this temper, and but at some times: so that, if vice and wickedness do generally break the firmness of men's spirits, it remains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage against death. And this the Christian religion does eminently to those who live according to it; our blessed Saviour having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us assurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekness, and patience, and humility, and modesty, and such virtues of Christianity, do not, in reason, tend to dispirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceness and brutishness of it. This we see in ex-

perience, that men of the truest courage have many times least of pride and insolence, of passion and fierceness. Those who are better bred, are commonly of more gentle and civil dispositions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughness and fool-hardiness of men of ruder breeding. So, in a true Christian, courage and greatness of mind is very consistent with meekness, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very courageous; there is much of this in the natural temper of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that Christianity is no hinderance to men's courage, and that, *cæteris paribus*, supposing men of equal tempers, no man hath so much reason to be valiant, as he that hath a good conscience; I do not mean a blustering, and boisterous, and rash courage; but a sober, and calm, and fixed valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages, and sexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen soldiers comparable to the Christian legion, for resolution and courage, even the heathens themselves being judges? The religion of Mahomet seems to be contrived to inspire men with fierceness and desperateness of resolution, and yet I do not find, but that generally, where there hath been any equality for number, the Christians have been superior to them in valour, and have given greater instances of resolution and courage, than the Turks have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up against Christianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of

this religion, or from the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And surely the best way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to consider what effects it hath had in the constant experience of mankind. There remain the other two objections which I mentioned, but I must reserve them to another opportunity.

SERMON CXVIII.

THE PREJUDICES AGAINST JESUS AND HIS RELIGION CONSIDERED.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.—MATT. xi. 6.

FROM these words I proposed to consider these two things:

I. The prejudices and objections which the world at first had, and many still have, against our blessed Saviour and his religion.

II. That it is a great happiness to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion.

I have considered those objections which the Jews and heathen philosophers made against our Saviour and his religion: and,

II. Those which, at this day, are insisted upon by the secret and open enemies of our religion. And I mentioned seven, the two last of which I shall now speak to.

Sixthly, It is objected, that there are many divisions and factions among Christians. This I confess is a great reproach and scandal to our religion; but no sufficient argument against it. And,

1. To lessen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be considered, that a very great part of the divisions, that are among those that are called Christians, are about things that do not concern the essentials of Christianity; and therefore they are no argu-

ment that Christianity is not true, because they bring no suspicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of Christianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. It is true, indeed, they are very indecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the Christian religion; which, above any religion in the world, does strictly require love and unity. They take off much from the strength and beauty of our religion: but do by no means destroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great soever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reason be imputed to the Christian religion, as giving any cause or encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occasion of them. For no man doubts but that the best thing in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occasion of a great deal of mischief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that mischief. No man can deny but that Christianity does strictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity, among all the members of that profession; and so far as Christians are factious and unpeaceable, so far they are no Christians. So that a man may as well except against philosophy, because of the differences that were among the philosophers, and say there was no truth among them, because they were not all agreed in all things, as call the truth of Christianity in question, for the differences that are among Christians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except against laws and government; because, notwithstanding them, there are frequent seditions, and rebellions, infinite suits, and controversies, occasioned even by the very laws: but no man was ever so unreasonable as to think this a good reason against laws and government.

3. The divisions of Christians are so far from being an argument against Christianity, that, on the contrary, they are an argument that men should embrace Christianity more heartily, and make more conscience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greatest part of those contentions and uncharitable animosities which are among them would presently cease. If the Christian religion were truly entertained, and men did seriously mind the precepts of it, and give up themselves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be easily commenced, nor so vehemently prosecuted, nor so pertinaciously continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every slight reason, and little doubt and scruple, rend and tear the body of Christ in pieces, and separate themselves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized, and received their Christianity.

If men seriously considered, and truly understood what they do, when they divide the church of Christ upon little scruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themselves Christians, whilst they continued in these unchristian and uncharitable practices.

If men would but be, or do what Christianity requires, there would be no occasion for this objection; and if men will not, the Christian religion is not to be blamed for it, but those that act so contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh, and last objection; The vicious and wicked lives of a great part of the professors of Christianity. This is a heavy objection, indeed, and such an one, that though we may justly be ashamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it.

It is so sad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with shame and blushing; but yet it is an objection not so strong against Christianity, as it is shameful to Christians. And notwithstanding the utmost force of it, we have no cause to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; but the gospel of Christ may justly be ashamed of us. For whatever we be, "the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation." The natural tendency of it is to reform and save men; and "the wrath of God is therein revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, however they may detain the truths of God in unrighteousness," and not suffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular answer to it, I desire you to attend to these following considerations:

1. It cannot be denied, but that Christianity hath had once very great and marvellous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive Christians; for which we have not only the testimony of our own books and writers, but even of the adversaries of our religion. What reformation Christianity at first wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full testimony, from what the apostles wrote concerning the several churches which they planted in several parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among Christians; even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private estates and possessions for the common support of their brethren, we may read in the history of the Acts of the Apostles. The city of Corinth, by the account which Strabo gives of it, was a very vicious

and luxurious place, as most in the world; and yet we see, by St. Paul, what a strange reformation the Christian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them; (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10, 11.) "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And surely it is no small matter to reclaim men from such a profligate course of life. The apostle instanceth in crimes and vices of the first rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleansed and purified "by the name of the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit of God:" that is, by the power and efficacy of the Christian doctrine, together with the co-operation of God's Holy Spirit.

After the apostles, the ancient fathers, in their apologies for Christianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the Christian doctrine upon the lives and manners of men. Tertullian tells the Roman governors, that their prisons were full of malefactors, committed for several crimes; but they were all heathens. *De vestris semper æstuat carcer*, "their prisons were thronged with criminals of their own religion;" but there were no Christians to be found committed there for such crimes; *Nemo illic Christianus, nisi hoc tantum*, &c. "There were no Christians in their prisons, but only upon account of their religion:" or if there were any malefactors that had been Christians, they left their religion when they fell into those enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if Christians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted Christians, but were

banished from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the heathens, what a sudden and strange change Christianity had made in several of the most lewd, and vicious, and debauched persons, and what a visible reformation there presently appeared in the lives of the worst of men, after they had once entertained the Christian doctrine.

And these testimonies are so much the stronger, because they are public appeals to our adversaries, which it is not likely, they who were so persecuted and hated as the Christians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriously true, even their enemies themselves being judges.

And that they were so, we have the confession of the heathens themselves. I shall produce two remarkable testimonies to this purpose, and one of them from the pen of one of the bitterest enemies that the Christian religion ever had.

Pliny, in his Epistle to Trajan the emperor, gives him an account, "That having examined the Christians, setting aside the superstition of their way, he could find no fault; and that this was the sum of their error, that they were wont to meet before day, and sing a hymn to Christ, and to bind themselves, by a solemn oath or sacrament, not to any wicked purpose, but not to steal, nor rob, nor commit adultery, nor break their faith, nor detain the pledge." So that it seems the sum of their error was, to oblige themselves in the strictest manner against the greatest vices and crimes. Which methinks is a great testimony from an enemy and a judge, one who would have been ready to discover their faults, and had opportunity of inquiring into them.

My other witness is Julian, the emperor and

apostate, who, in one of his epistles tells us, " The Christians did severely punish sedition and impiety." And afterwards, exhorting the heathen priests to all offices of humanity, and especially alms towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault; " because (says he) the Galileans, taking advantage of our neglect in this kind, have very much strengthened their impiety (for so he calls their religion) by being very intent upon these offices, and exemplary in their charity to the poor, whereby they gained many over to them."

And in his 49th Epistle to Arsacius, the high priest of Galatia, he recommends to him, among other means for the advancement of paganism, the building of hospitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only for their own religion, but others. " For (says he) it is a shame that the impious Galileans should not only maintain their own poor, but ours also; wherefore, let us not suffer them to outdo us in this virtue." Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted so full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the Christians, from so bitter an enemy of our religion as Julian was. If he owned it, we may be sure it was very great and exemplary.

So that you see that the Christian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it first appeared in the world. And the true spirit and genius of any religion, the force of any institution, is best seen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weakened and dispirited by those corruptions, which in time are apt to insinuate themselves into the best things. For all laws and institutions are commonly more vigorous,

and have greater effects at first, than afterwards; and the best things are apt in time to degenerate, and to contract soil and rust. And it cannot in reason be expected otherwise. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greatest care and diligence to be resisted, yet it is not so extremely to be wondered at, if Christianity, in the space of sixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its first strength and vigour.

Especially considering, that there were several circumstances, that gave Christianity mighty advantages at first, especially the miraculous powers which did accompany the first publication of the gospel; which must needs be full of conviction to those who saw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men to dispose them to the receiving of it; the persecuted and suffering state that Christians were generally in, which made those who embraced the profession to be generally serious and in good earnest in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which cost them so dear, and for which they suffered so much: and the fury of their enemies against it, did naturally inflame their love and kindness to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common sufferings in a common cause. So long as Christians were not corrupted by secular interest, and by denying all for Christ were free from covetousness and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of Christ, "though she was black, yet she was comely, and terrible as an army with banners;" she was all this while in an excellent posture to resist the temptations, and fight against the vices and corruptions of the world; but

after the world broke in upon the church, and Christianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and watered with secular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the tares began to grow up with the wheat: then "iniquity began to abound, and the love of many to grow cold." When the sun of prosperity began to shine upon the Christian profession, then no wonder if the vermin bred and swarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be Christians; this must, in all reason, make a world of hypocrites and counterfeit professors.

These things, I reckon, must, in reason, make a mighty difference between the first ages of Christianity, and those which have followed since; and no wonder if the real fruits and effects of religion in these several states of Christianity be very unequal. For prosperity and adversity made a wide difference in this matter. The persecution of any religion naturally makes the professors of it real; and the prosperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites: besides that, even the best of men are more corrupted by prosperity than affliction.

But though Christians were best under persecution, yet God did not think fit always to continue them in that state, because he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual sufferings; and after he had given the world a sufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the Christian religion, in maintaining and propagating itself in despite of all the violence and opposition of the world, sufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more human ways, and such as offer less violence to the nature of a man. Being once established and settled

in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God left it to be supported by more ordinary means ; by pious education, and diligent instruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without persecution, and without those extraordinary and overpowering communications of his grace and Spirit which he afforded to the first ages of Christianity.

I have insisted the longer upon this, that men may see what effects Christianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may see the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder so much that it hath not the same effects now. Though it be matter of great shame to us, that they are so vastly disproportionable to what they were at first.

2. Though the disproportion be very great between the effects of Christianity at first, and what it hath now upon the lives of men ; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath still some good effects upon mankind ; and it is our great shame and fault that it hath no better. If we will speak justly of things, as to the general civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarousness, and cruelty, and some other enormous vices ; yea, and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of a great number of particular persons of several nations, there is no comparison between the general state of Christendom, and the pagan and Mahometan parts of the world. Next to Christianity, and the law of Moses (which was confined to one nation), philosophy was the most likely instrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world ; and it had very considerable effects upon some particular persons, both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming

of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind did very little in either of these respects, especially as to the rectifying the absurd and impious opinions of the people concerning God, and their superstitious worship of the Deity. Whereas the Christian religion did universally, wherever it came, set men free from those gross impieties and superstitions, and taught men to worship the only true God in a right manner.

Though we must confess, to the eternal reproach of the Christian religion, that the Western church hath degenerated so far, that it seems to be in a great measure relapsed into the ignorance and superstition of paganism; out of which degeneracy, that God hath rescued us, as we have infinite cause to adore his goodness, so we have all the reason in the world to dread and detest a return into this spiritual Egypt, this house of darkness and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under that yoke, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.

So that you see that there are still very considerable effects of the Christian religion in the world, yea, and I doubt not but in those places where it is most corrupted and degenerated; because they still retain the essential doctrines of Christianity, which have not quite lost their force, notwithstanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixed with them. And as God knows, and every man sees it, that the generality of Christians are very bad, notwithstanding all the influence of that excellent religion which they profess; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worse without it. For though very many, who have entertained the principles of Christianity, are very wicked in their lives, yet many are otherwise; and those that are bad

have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked course, and sometime does: whereas the case of those persons would have been desperate, were it not for those principles of religion which were implanted in them by Christian education; and though they were long suppressed, yet did at last awaken them to a consideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are some persons as bad, nay, perhaps worse, that have been bred up in the Christian religion, than are commonly to be found in the darkness of paganism; for the corruption of the best things is the worst, and those who have resisted so great a light as that of the gospel is, are like to prove the most desperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worse use of than of light and liberty, two of the best and most pleasant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abused to the worst purpose, and liberty into licentiousness and sedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance desirable, or would wish a perpetual night and darkness to the world; and conclude from the inconveniences of abused liberty, that the best state of things would be, that the generality of mankind should be all slaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines.

There are many times as bad consequences of good things as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, so likewise the Christian religion is a great happiness to the world in general, though some are so unhappy as to be the worse for it; not because religion is bad, but because they are so.

4. If religion be a matter of men's free choice, it is not to be expected that it should necessarily and constantly have its effect upon men; for it works upon us not by a way of force or natural necessity, but of moral persuasion. If religion, and the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be so unless he were thus violently forced, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwise. For then the reason why some men were good, would be because they could not help it; and others bad, because the grace of God did not make them so whether they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the shortest and plainest precepts of a good life; it persuades men to the obedience of these precepts, by the promises of eternal happiness, and the threatenings of eternal misery in case of obstinate disobedience: it offers us the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to help our weakness, and enable us to that for which we are not sufficient of ourselves: but there is nothing of violence or necessity in all this. After all, men may disobey these precepts, and not be persuaded by these arguments, may not make use of this grace which God offers, may "quench and resist the Holy Ghost, and reject the counsel of God against themselves." And the case being thus, it is no wonder if the temptations of this present world prevail upon the vicious inclinations of men against their duty, and their true interest; and consequently, if the motives and arguments of the Christian religion have not a constant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that Christianity is apt to bring men to goodness; but some are so

obstinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the most powerful considerations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that Christianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore, wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the Christian religion that we are not good: so that the bad lives of Christians are no sufficient objection either against the truth or goodness of the Christian doctrine. Besides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its Divine and heavenly original. And surely the goodness of any religion consists in the sufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to persuade men to it; and the suitableness of its aids and helps to enable us to the discharge and performance of it. And all those advantages the Christian religion hath above any religion or institution that ever was in the world. The reasonable and plain rules of a good life are no where so perfectly collected, as in the discourses of our blessed Saviour and his apostles. No religion ever gave men so full assurance of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world; nor such gracious promises of Divine assistance, and such evidence of it, especially in the piety, and virtue, and patience, and self-denial of the primitive Christians, as the doctrine of God our Saviour hath done, "which teacheth men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, in contemplation of the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might re-

deem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

6. And lastly, After all that hath or can be said, it must be acknowledged, and ought sadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of Christians are a marvellous scandal and reproach to our holy religion, and a great obstacle to the spreading of it in the world, and a real objection against it to prejudiced persons, with whom it doth justly bring into doubt the goodness and efficacy of the institution itself, to see how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent master in any kind, when all the world sees that most of his scholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or science, men will question the truth and reality of it, when they see the greatest part of those who profess it, not able to do any thing answerable to it. The Christian religion pretends to be an art of serving God more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it be so, why do not the professors of this excellent religion shew the force and virtue of it in their lives? And though I have sufficiently shewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth, and disparage the excellency of the Christian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced persons, and it cannot be expected otherwise.

So that we have infinite reason to be ashamed, that there is so plain a contrariety between the laws of Christianity, and the lives of the greatest part of Christians; so notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the Bible, and that which is to be seen and read in the conversations of men.

Who, that looks upon the manners of the present age, could believe (if he did not know it), that the holy and pure doctrine of the Christian religion had ever been so much as heard, much less pretended to be entertained and believed among us? Nay, among those who seem to make a more serious profession of religion, when we consider how strangely they allow themselves in malice and envy, in passion, and anger, and uncharitable censures, and evil speaking, in fierce contentions and animosities; who would believe that the great instrument of these men's religion, I mean the Holy Bible, by which they profess to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and strict precepts of love and kindness, of charity and peace; and did a hundred times, with all imaginable severity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of God, forbid malice, and envy, and revenge, and evil speaking, and rash and uncharitable censures, and tell us so plainly that the Christian religion obligeth men to put off all these; and that "if any man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain?" Do men read and hear these things every day, and profess to believe them to be the truths of God, and yet live as if they were verily persuaded they were false? What can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not Christianity, or the greatest part of us are no Christians?

So that if one of the apostles or primitive Christians should rise from the dead, and converse among us, how would he wonder to see the face and complexion of Christianity altered from what it was in their days? and were it not for the name and title which we bear, would sooner guess us to be any thing than Christians.

So that, upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit ourselves of this objection, and to wash away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vicious manners of men will affect our religion with obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot see how Christianity can ever gain much ground in the world, till it be better adorned and recommended by the professors of it. Nay, we have just cause to fear, that if God do not raise up some great and eminent instruments to awaken the world out of this stupid lethargy, that Christianity will every day decline, and the world will in a short space be overrun with atheism and infidelity. For vice, and superstition, and enthusiasm, which are the reigning diseases of Christendom, when they have run their course, and finished their circle, do all naturally end and meet in atheism. And then it will be time for the great Judge of the world to appear, and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be persuaded to believe by any other means. And of this our Saviour hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation, in that question of his; "When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith upon earth?" Our Saviour hath not positively affirmed it, and God grant that we may not make it, and find it true!

And thus I have, by God's assistance, given the best satisfaction I could to the most material exceptions I have met with against our blessed Saviour and his religion. The

Second thing remains briefly to be spoken to; viz. How happy a thing it is to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against re-

ligion: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." And this will appear if we consider these three or four things:

First, That prejudice does many times sway and bias men against the plainest and clearest truths. We see, in daily experience, what a false bias prejudice puts upon men's understandings. Men that are educated in the grossest errors and superstitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in the wrong way! And with what difficulty are they persuaded of their mistake! Nay, they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much less to consider what may be offered against it. How do the passions and lusts of men blind them and lead them aside from the truth, and incline them to that side of the question which is most favourable to their lusts and interests! How partially do men lean to that part which makes most for their advantage, though all the reason in the world lie on the other side!

Now ignorance and mistake are a great slavery of the understanding, if there were no worse consequences of our errors: and therefore our Saviour says excellently, that the truth makes men free: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Secondly, Prejudice does not only bias men against the plainest truths, but in matters of greatest concernment, in things that concern the honour of God, and the good of others, and our own welfare and happiness. Prejudices against religion occasion mistakes of the highest nature, and may lead men to superstition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay, many times to atheism and infidelity. The prejudices against the doctrine of our

Saviour are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have against the writers of natural philosophy or eloquence, or any other human art or science. If a man's prejudice make him err in these matters the thing is of no great moment; but the business of religion is a matter of the greatest and weightiest concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, The consequences of men's prejudices in these things prove many times fatal and destructive to them. Men may, upon unreasonable prejudices, "reject the counsel of God against themselves," as it is said of the chief priests and pharisees among the Jews. Men may oppose the truth so obstinately and perversely, as to be fighters against God, and to bring certain ruin and swift destruction upon themselves, both in this world and the other, as the Jews did; who, by opposing the doctrine of the gospel, and persecuting our Saviour and his disciples, "filled up the measure of their sins, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost." It is easy to entertain prejudices against religion, and, by considering only the wrong side of things, to fortify our prejudices to such a degree, and entrench ourselves so strongly in our errors, that the plainest and most convincing truths shall not be able to have any access to us, or make any impression upon us; but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happiness, and are secretly working our own ruin; and while we think we are opposing an enemy, we are destroying ourselves; "for who hath hardened himself against God," and his truth, "and prospered?" The principles of religion are a firm and immoveable rock, against which the more violently we dash ourselves, the more miserably we shall be split and shattered. Our

blessed Saviour and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, " a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence;" but he himself hath told us what shall be the fate of those who are offended at him: " Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder." And, therefore, well might he say here in the text, " Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

Fourthly, There are but few, in comparison, who have the happiness to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion. Thus, to be sure, it was when Christianity first appeared in the world: and though among us the great prejudice of education be removed, yet there are still many, who, upon one account or other, are prejudiced against religion, at least so far as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are so impartial in considering things, as not to be swayed by the interest of their lusts and passions, as to keep the balance of their judgments even, and to suffer nothing but truth and reason to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be " pilgrims and strangers in the world," and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers, who are not concerned to find out the fairest and the easiest way, but to know which is the right way and to go in it. Thus it should be with us, our end should always be in our eye, and we should choose our way only with respect to that; not considering our inclination so much as our design, nor choosing those principles for the government of our lives which are most agreeable to our present desires, but those which will most certainly bring us to happiness at

the last; and that I am sure the principles of the Christian religion, firmly believed and practised by us, will do.

Let us then be persuaded, by all that hath been said upon this argument, to a firm belief of the Christian doctrine. I hope you are, in some measure, satisfied, that the objections against it are not such as ought much to move a wise and considerate man. If we believe that God hath taken so much care of mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happiness; let us next consider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the Christian, and with half that reason pretend to be from God, that Christianity is able to produce for itself, whether we consider the things to be believed, or the duties to be practised, or the motives and arguments to the practice of those duties, or the Divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus persuaded concerning it, let us resolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it signifies nothing, without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once resolved upon, the difficulty of believing would cease; for the true reason why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the gospel, is because they are loath to put them in practice. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light." The true ground of most men's prejudice against the Christian doctrine is, because they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of men's minds against it, is, that it is an enemy to their lusts, and they cannot profess to believe it without condemning themselves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

SERMON CXIX.

JESUS THE SON OF GOD, PROVED BY HIS RESURRECTION.

And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.—ROM. i. 4.

ST. Paul, in the beginning of this Epistle (according to his custom in the rest) styles himself an apostle, particularly called and set apart by God for the preaching of the gospel; the main subject whereof was "Jesus Christ our Lord," who, as he was, according to his Divine nature, "the eternal Son of God;" so, according to his human nature, he was not only the Son of man, but also the Son of God. "According to the flesh (that is, the weakness, and frailty, and mortality of his human nature) he was the Son of David;" that is, of his posterity by his mother, who was of that house and line. "Made of the seed of David, according to the flesh," (ver. 3.) But "according to the Spirit of holiness" (that is, in regard of that Divine power of the Holy Ghost, which was manifest in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead) he was demonstrated to be the Son of God; even according to his human nature; "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

All the difficulty in the words is concerning the meaning of this phrase; of Christ's being "declared

to be the Son of God." The word is ὁρισθέντος, which most frequently in Scripture does signify, predestinated, decreed, determined; but likewise signifies, that which is defined, declared, demonstrated, put out of all doubt and controversy:—and in this sense our translation renders it. As if the apostle had said, that our Lord Jesus Christ, though, according to the frailty and weakness of his human nature, he was of the seed of David; yet, in respect of that Divine power of the Holy Ghost, which manifested itself in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead, he was "declared to be the Son of God, with power;" that is, mightily, powerfully demonstrated to be so; so as to put the matter out of all dispute and controversy.

And, therefore, following our own translation, I shall handle the words in this sense, as containing this proposition in them;—that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, by the Holy Ghost, is a powerful demonstration that he was the Son of God.

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this proposition to consider these two things:

First, Upon what account Christ, as man, is said to be "the Son of God."

Secondly, In what sense he is said to be "declared to be the Son of God" by his resurrection from the dead. The consideration of these two particulars will fully clear this proposition, and the apostle's meaning in it.

First, Upon what account Christ, as a man, is said to be "the Son of God." And for our right apprehension of this matter, it is very well worthy our observation, that Christ, as man, is no where in Scripture said to be "the Son of God," but with relation to the

Divine power of the Holy Ghost, some way or other eminently manifested in him; I say the Divine power of the Holy Ghost, as the Lord and Giver of life, as he is called in the ancient creeds of the Christian church. For as men are naturally said to be the children of those from whom they receive their life and being; so Christ, as man, is said to be the Son of God, because he had life communicated to him from the Father, by an immediate power of the Spirit of God, or the Holy Ghost. First, at his conception, which was by the Holy Ghost: the conception of our blessed Saviour was an immediate act of the power of the Holy Ghost, overshadowing, as the Scripture expresses it, the blessed mother of our Lord: and then at his resurrection, when, after his death, he was, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, raised to life again.

Now, upon these two accounts only, Christ, as man, is said in Scripture to be "the Son of God." He was really so upon account of his conception; but this was secret and invisible; but most eminently and remarkably so, upon account of his resurrection, which was open and visible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the Holy Ghost. That, upon this account, he was called the Son of God, St. Luke most expressly tells us, (Luke i. 35.) where the angel tells the Virgin Mary, that—the Holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the Highest should overshadow her, and therefore that holy thing, which should be born of her, should be called the Son of God. And this our Saviour means, by the Father's sanctifying him, and sending him into the world; for which reason, he says, he might justly call himself the Son of God: (John x. 35, 36.) "If ye called them gods,

unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken: say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" If there had been no other reason, this had been sufficient to have given him the title of the Son of God, that he was brought into the world by the sanctification, or Divine power, of the Holy Ghost.

2. Christ is also said in Scripture to be the Son of God, and to be declared to be so, upon account of his resurrection from the dead, by the power of the Holy Ghost. His resurrection from the dead is here in the text ascribed to the Spirit of holiness, or the Holy Ghost. And so in other places of Scripture: (Rom. viii. 11.) "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you:" and, (1 Pet. iii. 18.) "Being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit;" that is, he suffered in that frail mortal nature which he assumed, but was raised again by the power of the Holy Ghost, of the Spirit of God which resided in him. And upon this account he is expressly said, in Scripture, to be the Son of God. (Psal. ii. 7.) "I will declare the decree; the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee:" to which, perhaps, the apostle alludes here in the text, when he says, that "Christ was decreed to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead." To be sure, these words, "this day have I begotten thee," St. Paul expressly tells us were accomplished in the resurrection of Christ; as if God, by raising him from the dead, had begotten him, and decreed him to be his Son. (Acts xiii. 32, 33.) "And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the

same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

He was the Son of God before, as he was conceived by the Holy Ghost; but this was secret and invisible, and known only to the mother of our Lord: and therefore God thought fit to give a public and visible demonstration of it, so as to put the matter out of all question; he declared him in a powerful manner to be his Son, by giving him a new life after death, by raising him from the dead; and by this new and eminent testimony given to him, declared him again to be his Son, and confirmed the title which was given him before, upon a true but more secret account, of his being conceived by the Holy Ghost.

And as our Saviour is said to be the Son of God upon this twofold account, of his conception by the Holy Ghost, and his resurrection to life by the Spirit of God; so the Scripture (which does solicitously pursue a resemblance and conformity between Christ and Christians) does likewise, upon a twofold account (answerable to our Saviour's birth and resurrection), call true believers and Christians the children of God; viz. upon account of their regeneration, or new birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God; and upon account of their resurrection to eternal life, by the power of the same Spirit.

Upon account of our regeneration, and becoming Christians by the power and operation of the Holy Spirit of God upon our minds, we are said to be the children of God, as being regenerated and born again by the Holy Spirit of God: and this is our first adoption: and for this reason the Spirit of God conferred

upon Christians at their baptism, and dwelling and residing in them afterwards, is called the Spirit of adoption; (Rom. viii. 15.) "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, Abba, Father;" and (Gal. iv. 5, 6.) believers are said to "receive the adoption of sons; God having sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father;" that is, all Christians, forasmuch as they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, and having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, may with confidence call God Father, and look upon themselves as his children. So the apostle tells us, (Rom. viii. 14.) "That as many as are led (or acted) by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God."

But though we are said to be children of God upon account of our regeneration, and the Holy Spirit of God dwelling and residing in Christians; yet we are eminently so, upon account of our resurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of God's Spirit. This is our final adoption and the consummation of it; and therefore, (Rom. viii. 21.) this is called "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," because by this we are for ever "delivered from the bondage of corruption;" and by way of eminency, the adoption; viz. the redemption of our bodies.

We are indeed the sons of God before, upon account of the regenerating and sanctifying virtue of the Holy Ghost; but finally, and chiefly, upon account of our resurrection by the power of the Divine Spirit. So St. John tells us, that then we shall be declared to be the sons of God, after another manner than we are now: (1 John iii. 1.) "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Now

we are the sons of God (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and sanctification), but it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" we shall be much more eminently so at the resurrection. "We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him."

But the most express and remarkable text to this purpose, is Luke xx. 35, 36. where good men, after the resurrection, are for this reason said to be the children of God, because they are the children of the resurrection. "But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." For this reason they are said to be the children of God, because they are raised by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of that which is promised to them, and reserved for them. For all that are raised by the power of God out of the dust of the earth, are not therefore the children of God; but only they that have part in the blessed resurrection to eternal life, and do inherit the kingdom prepared for them. Not those who are raised to a perpetual death, and the resurrection of condemnation. These are not the children of God; but the children of wrath, and the children of perdition.

But the resurrection of the just, is the full and final declaration, that we are the children of God; not only because we are restored to a new life, but because, at the resurrection, we are admitted to the full possession of that blessed inheritance which is purchased for us, and promised to us.

And the Spirit of God, which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells

and resides in them, is the pledge and earnest of our final adoption, by our resurrection to eternal life; and upon this account and no other, is said to be the earnest of our future inheritance, and the seal and confirmation of it. (Eph. i. 13.) "In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession;" that is, the Holy Spirit of God, which Christians were made partakers of, upon their sincere belief of the Christain religion, is the seal and earnest of our resurrection to eternal life; as the apostle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text, (Rom. viii. 11.) "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."

I have been the longer upon this, because it serves fully to explain to us those obscure phrases, of the seal and earnest, and first fruits of the Spirit, which many have mistaken to import some particular and spiritual revelation or impression, upon the minds of good men, assuring them of their salvation. Whereas the apostle intended no more by them, but that the Spirit of God, which dwells in believers, enabling them "to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit," is a pledge and earnest to us of a blessed resurrection to eternal life by the power of the Spirit of God, which now dwells in us, and is the same Spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead. And in this chapter, the Spirit of God is said (ver. 16.) to "bear witness to our spirits," that is, to assure our minds, "that we are the children of God;" that is, that we are his children now, and consequently heirs of a glorious

resurrection to eternal life: for so it follows in the next words, "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together." And this being glorified together with Christ at the resurrection, he calls, (ver. 19.) "the manifestation of the sons of God." Thus you see how, in conformity to the Son of God, our elder brother, we are said to be the sons of God, because we are now regenerated, and shall, at the last day, be raised up to eternal life, by the power of the Spirit of God. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to speak to, for the clearing of these words; namely, In what sense Christ is to be "declared, or demonstrated, to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." By which the apostle means these two things:

1. That by his resurrection from the dead he was approved by God to be the true Messias, and vindicated to the world from all suspicion of being a deceiver and impostor. And consequently, in the

2. Second place, That hereby God gave testimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

1. By his resurrection from the dead, he was approved by God to be the true Messias, foretold by the prophets, and expected at that time by the Jews, and sufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impostor.

And for our fuller understanding of this, we are to consider these two things:

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the Messias. And,

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the Jews were concerning the Messias. And it is very plain from the evangelical history, that they generally apprehended these two things of him: that the Messias was to be the Son of God, and the King of Israel; and, therefore, that our Saviour, by affirming himself to be the Messias, did call himself "the Son of God," and "the King of Israel." John i. 41, Andrew tells his brother Simon, "we have found the Messias." Ver. 45, Philip tells Nathanael, "we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write;" that is, the Messias. Ver. 49, Nathanael upon discourse with our Saviour, being convinced that he was the Messias, owns him in these terms; "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel." John vi. 69, Peter declares his belief that he was the Christ, or the Messias, in these words; "We believe and are sure, that thou art the Son of the living God." This appears likewise from the high priest's question to him, (Matt. xxvi. 63.) "Art thou the Christ (that is, the Messias), the Son of the living God?" or, as it is in St. Mark, "the Son of the blessed;" compared with Pilate's question, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" And when he was upon the cross, some reviled him under the notion of the Son of God; (Matt. xxvii. 40.) "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross:" others, under the notion of the King of Israel; (ver. 42.) "If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross." From all which it is plain that the Jews expected and believed, that the true Messias was to be the Son of God, and the King of Israel; and whoever was not so, was a deceiver and impostor. But our Saviour affirmed himself to be the true

Messias, and the Son of God. Now God, by raising him from the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the world from all suspicion of imposture; and gave testimony to him, that he was all that he said of himself; viz. the true Messias, and the Son of God.

Which will further appear, if we consider (2dly), What were the crimes which the Jews laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly these two—that, by giving himself out to be the Messias, he made himself King of Israel, and the Son of God. Of the first of these they accused him to Pilate, hoping by this accusation to make him guilty of sedition against the Roman government, for saying that he was the King of Israel. Of the other, they accused him to the chief priests, as being guilty of blasphemy, in that, not being the Messias, he called himself the Son of God. And upon this they laid the main stress, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his lifetime, as appears by those words of our Saviour, (John x. 36.) "Say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?" And when he was arraigned before the chief priests, they accused him of this, and he owning this charge, "that he called himself the Son of God," upon this they judged him guilty of death. (Matt. xxvi. 65, 66.) "Then the high-priest rent his clothes, and said, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witness? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered, He is guilty of death." And when Pilate told them, that he found no fault in him, they still in-

stance in this as his crime, (John xix. 7.) "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

Now, this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; God, by raising him up from the dead, and taking him up into heaven, gave testimony to him, that he was no impostor, and that he did not vainly arrogate to himself to be the Messias and the Son of God. God, by raising him from the dead, by the power of the Holy Ghost, gave a mighty demonstration to him, that he was the Son of God. For which reason he is said, by the apostle, (1 Tim. iii. 16.) to be "justified by the Spirit." The Spirit gave testimony to him at his baptism, and by the mighty works that appeared in him in his lifetime; but he was most eminently and remarkably "justified by the Holy Ghost, by his resurrection from the dead;" God hereby bearing him witness, that he was unjustly condemned, and that he assumed nothing to himself, but what of right did belong to him, when he said he was the Messias, and the Son of God. For how could a man that was condemned to die for calling himself the Son of God, be more remarkably vindicated, and more clearly proved to be so, than by being raised from the dead, by the power of God?

And, 2dly, God did consequently hereby give testimony to the truth and divinity of our Saviour's doctrine. Being proved by his resurrection to be the Son of God, this proved him to be a teacher sent by him, and that what he declared to the world was the mind and will of God. For this none was more likely to know, and to report truly to mankind, than the Son of God, who came from the

bosom of his Father. And because the resurrection of Christ is so great a testimony to the truth of his doctrine, hence it is that St. Paul tells us, that the belief of this one article of Christ's resurrection is sufficient to a man's salvation; (Rom. x. 9.) "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The reason is plain, because the resurrection of Christ confirmed the truth and divinity of his doctrine; so that the belief of our Saviour's resurrection does, by necessary consequence, infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That God raised him from the dead, after he was condemned and put to death for calling himself the Son of God, is a demonstration that he really was the Son of God; and if he was the Son of God, the doctrine which he taught was true, and from God.

And thus I have shewn you, how the resurrection of Christ from the dead, is a powerful demonstration that he was the Son of God.

All that remains, is briefly to draw some practical inferences from the consideration of our Saviour's resurrection.

First, To confirm and establish our minds in the belief of the Christian religion, of which the resurrection of Christ from the dead is so great a confirmation. And, therefore, I told you, that this one article is mentioned by St. Paul, as the sum and abridgment of the Christian faith; "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." The belief of our Saviour's resurrection doth, by necessary consequence, infer the belief of his whole doctrine; for he

who believes that God raised him from the dead, after he was put to death for calling himself the Son of God, cannot but believe him to be the Son of God; and consequently, that the doctrine which he delivered was from God.

Secondly, The resurrection of Christ from the dead assures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That Christ was raised from the dead, is a demonstration of another life after this; and no man that believes the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment; so that, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God hath given assurance unto all men of a future judgment, and consequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The consideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more especially to these three purposes:

1st, To raise our minds above the present enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlasting ages; would we but sometimes represent to ourselves, what thoughts and apprehensions dying men have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them; how like a pageant and shadow it looks, as it passeth away from them; methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his soul; but, notwithstanding all the present delights and allurements of sense, we should be strongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vast eternity which we are ready to enter into. For

what is there in this world, this vast and howling wilderness, this rude and barbarous country, which we are but to pass through, which should detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation, from that better, and that heavenly country, where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2dly, The consideration of the rewards of another world should comfort and support us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a blessed resurrection are a very proper consideration to bear us up under the evils and pressures of this life. If we hope for so great a happiness hereafter, we may be contented to bear some afflictions in this world; because the blessedness which we expect will so abundantly recompense and outweigh our present sufferings. So the apostle assures us; (Rom. viii. 18.) "We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." The consideration whereof was that which made the primitive Christians to triumph in their sufferings, and in the midst of all their tribulations to "rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God;" because their sufferings did really prepare and make way for their glory. So the same apostle tells us, (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.) "Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

3dly and lastly, The assurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and a holy life. What greater encouragement can we

have than this, that all the good which we do in this world will accompany us into the other? That "when we rest from our labours, our works will follow us?" That when we shall be stripped of other things, and parted from them, these will still remain with us, and bear us company? Our riches and honours, our sensual pleasures and enjoyments, will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us so far as the grave, but take occasion to forsake us, when we have the greatest need and use of them: but piety and virtue are "that better part which cannot be taken from us." All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and, through the merits of our Redeemer, procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanness of our services, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vastness of his treasures and estate.

Now, what an encouragement is this to holiness and obedience, to consider that it will all be our own another day; to be assured that whoever serves God faithfully, and does suffer for him patiently, does lay up so much treasure for himself in another world, and provides lasting comforts for himself, and faithful and constant companions, that will never leave him nor forsake him?

Let us, then, do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and serve God with all our might; knowing, that no good action that we do shall be lost and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exercise in this life, and every degree of them, "shall receive their full recompence at the resurrection of the just."

How should this inspire us with resolution, and zeal, and industry in the service of God, to have such a reward continually in our eye; how should it tempt us to our duty, to have a crown and a kingdom offered to us, "joys unspeakable and full of glory, such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man?" And "such are the things which God hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and serve him faithfully in this world."

SERMON CXX.

THE DANGER OF APOSTACY FROM CHRISTIANITY.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.—HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6.

THESE words are full of difficulties, and the misunderstanding of them hath not only been an occasion of a great deal of trouble, and even despair, to particular persons, but one of the chief reasons why the church of Rome did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which, by the way, I cannot but take notice of, as a demonstrative instance both of the fallible judgment of that church, and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for St. Jerome more than once expressly tells us, "that in his time (which was about four hundred years after Christ) the church of Rome did not receive this Epistle for canonical:" but it is plain, that since that time, whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or (which is more probable) by the consent and authority of other churches, they have received it, and do at this day acknowledge it for canonical; from whence one of these two things will necessarily fol-

low; either that they were in an error for four hundred years together while they rejected it, or that they have since erred for a longer time in receiving it. One of these is unavoidable; for if the book be canonical now, it was so from the beginning; for Bellarmine himself confesseth (and if he had not confessed it, it is nevertheless true and certain), that the church cannot make a book canonical, which was not so before; if it was not canonical at first, it cannot be made so afterward; so that let them choose which part they will, it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of Rome hath actually erred in her judgment concerning the authority of this book; and one error of this kind is enough to destroy her infallibility, there being no greater evidence that a church is not infallible, than if it plainly appear that she hath been deceived.

And this, also, is a convincing instance of the fallibility of oral tradition. For if that be infallible in delivering down to us the canonical books of Scripture, it necessarily follows, that whatever books were delivered down to us for canonical in one age, must have been so in all ages; and whatever was rejected in any age, must always have been rejected: but we plainly see the contrary, from the instance of this Epistle, concerning which the church of Rome (which pretends to be the great and faithful preserver of tradition) hath in several ages delivered several things. This is a peremptory instance both of the fallibility of the Roman church, and of her oral tradition.

Having observed this by the way, which I could not well pass by upon so fair an occasion, I shall betake myself to the explication of these words; towards which it will be no small advantage to

consider the particular phrases and expressions in the text: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened;" that is, were solemnly admitted into the church by baptism, and embraced the profession of Christianity. Nothing was more frequent among the ancients, than to call baptism φωτισμὸν, "illumination;" and those who were baptized were called, φωτιζόμενοι, "enlightened persons," because of that Divine illumination which was conveyed to the minds of men by the knowledge of Christianity, the doctrine whereof they made profession of at their baptism. And, therefore, Justin Martyr tells us, that, by calling upon God the Father, and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the name of the Holy Ghost, ὁ φωτιζόμενος λοῦεται, "the enlightened person is washed;" and again more expressly, Καλεῖται δὲ τοῦτο λουτρὸν φωτισμὸς, "this laver (speaking of baptism) is called illumination." And St. Cyprian gives us the reason; because by virtue of baptism *in expiatum pectus ac purum desuper se lumen infundit*, "Light is infused from above into the purified soul." And that this expression is so to be understood here in the text, as also chap. x. 32. the Syriac and Ethiopic give us good ground to believe; for they render the text thus: "It is impossible for those who have been once baptized, and have tasted of the heavenly gift." And at the tenth chapter, ver. 32. which we translate, "But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;" that is, call to mind the former days, in which, after by baptism ye had publicly embraced the profession of Christianity, ye were, upon that account, exposed to many grievous sufferings and persecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by "those that

were once enlightened," the apostle means, those that were baptized.

To proceed then: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost;" these two expressions seem to denote the spiritual benefits and graces of the Holy Ghost conferred upon Christians by baptism, particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the Holy Ghost, and justification and remission of sins. So we find faith, whereby we are justified, called the gift of God, (Eph. ii. 8.) "Faith is the gift of God;" and our justification is called a gift, and a free gift, five several times in one chapter, (Rom. v. 15—18.) "But not as the offence, so also is the free gift; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many;" and what this free gift is he tells us in the next words; viz. justification, or remission of sins; (ver. 16.) "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." So that by the "heavenly gift," I understand remission of sins; and by being "made partakers of the Holy Ghost," the sanctifying power and efficacy of God's Spirit.

"And have tasted the good word of God;" that is, entertained the gospel, which is here called "the good word of God," by reason of the gracious promises contained in it, particularly the promises of eternal life and happiness.

"And the powers of the world to come," δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, the powers of the gospel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost which were bestowed upon men, in order to the propagation of the gospel. And that this is the true meaning of this phrase, will, I think, be very plain, to any one who shall but consider that the word δυνάμεις, is generally in Scripture used for miraculous powers and operations; and particularly to express the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were bestowed upon the apostles and first Christians; (I need not cite the particular texts for the proof of this, they are so many and so well known;) and then, if we consider farther, that the times of the gospel, the days of the Messias, are frequently called by the Jews, *sæculum futurum*, "the age to come." And, indeed, this is the very phrase used by the LXX. concerning our Saviour, (Isa. ix. 6.) where he is called, according to our translation, "The everlasting Father," but according to that of the LXX. πατὴρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, "The Father of the future age." And this very phrase is used once more in this Epistle to the Hebrews, ii. 5. "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak." He had said before, "that the law was given by angels," (ver. 2.) "if the word spoken by angels was steadfast;" but the dispensation of the gospel, which he calls "the world to come," or the future age, was not committed to them; this was administered by the "Son of God;"

" Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come." And it is observable, that this phrase is only used in this Epistle to the Hebrews, because the Jews very well understood the meaning of it, being that whereby they commonly expressed the times of the gospel, according to that ancient tradition of the house of Elias, which distributed the duration of the world into three αἰῶνες, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Messias, which they called the *seculum futurum*, or, the age to come; and which is likewise in Scripture called the last days, or times, and the conclusion of the ages. Concerning which it was particularly prophesied, that the Holy Ghost should be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this very purpose the prophet Joel is cited by St. Peter; (Acts ii. 16, 17.) " This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days (saith God), I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy," &c. From all which it is very evident, that by " tasting of the powers of the world to come," is meant, being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were poured forth in the gospel age, by the Jews commonly called, the world to come.

" If they shall fall away;" that is, if after all this they shall apostatize from this profession out of love to this present world, or from the fear of persecutions and sufferings.

" It is impossible to renew them again to repentance;" that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that such wilful and notorious apostates should be restored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we translate impossible, is

not always to be taken in the strictest sense, for that which absolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is so very difficult that it seems next to an impossibility. So our Saviour; that which in one place he calls "exceeding hard;" viz. "for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven," he afterwards calls "impossible with men;" and so here I understand the apostle, that those who apostatize from Christianity after baptism, and the benefits of it, "it is exceeding hard to recover them again to repentance:" this phrase, *πάλιν ἀνακαινίζειν εἰς μετάνοιαν*, to "renew them again to repentance," some understand of restoring them again to the peace and communion of the church, by a course of penance, such as was prescribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they understand by *ἀδύνατον*, not a natural, but a moral impossibility; that which cannot be done according to the orders and constitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuse to admit apostates, and some other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a course of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church. This Tertullian tells us was the strictness of the church in his time, *Neque idololatriæ, neque sanguini pax ab ecclesia redditur;* "they admitted neither idolaters nor murderers to the reconciliation of the church." Though they were never so patient, and shed never so many tears, yet, he says, they were *jejunæ pacis lachrymæ*, their tears were in vain to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He says, indeed, they did not absolutely pronounce their case desperate, in respect of God's pardon and forgiveness; *sed de venia Deo reservamus*, "for that they referred them to God:" but they were never to be admitted again

into the church; so strict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this text; though the church of Rome was more moderate in this matter, and for that reason called the authority of this book into question.

But I see no reason why these words should primarily be understood of restoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they seem to be meant of restoring men to the favour of God by repentance; of which, indeed, their being restored to the communion of the church was a good sign. This the apostle says was very difficult, for those who, after baptism, and the several benefits of it, did apostatize from Christianity, "to be recovered again to repentance."

"Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." This is spoken by way of aggravation of the crime of apostacy, that they who fall off from Christianity, in effect and by interpretation, do crucify the Son of God over again, and expose him to shame and reproach, as the Jews did; for by denying and renouncing of him, they declare him to be an impostor, and, consequently, worthy of that death which he suffered, and that ignominy which he was exposed to; and, therefore, in account of God, they are said to do that, which by their actions they do approve; so that it is made a crime of the highest nature, as if they should crucify the Son of God, and use him in the most ignominious manner, even tread "under foot the Son of God," as the expression is to the same purpose, (chap. x. 29.)

Thus I have endeavoured, as briefly and clearly as I could, to explain to you the true meaning and importance of the several phrases and expressions

in the text; the sense whereof amounts to this, that if those who are baptized, and by baptism have received remission of sins, and do believe the doctrine of the gospel, and the promises of it, and are endowed with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost; if such persons as these shall, after all this, apostatize from Christianity, it is very hard, and next to an impossibility, to imagine how such persons should recover again by repentance, seeing they are guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own persons they had put to death and ignominiously used "the Son of God," because, by rejecting of him, they declared to the world that he suffered deservedly.

Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about them, I shall endeavour to make out these five things:

1st, That the sin here mentioned is not "the sin against the Holy Ghost."

2dly, That the apostle does not declare it to be absolutely impossible, but only that those who are guilty of it are recovered to repentance with great difficulty.

3dly, That it is not a partial apostacy from the Christian religion by any particular vicious practice.

4thly, That it is a total apostacy from the Christian religion, and more especially to the heathen idolatry, which the apostle here speaks of.

5thly, The reason of the difficulty of the recovery of those who fall into this sin.

1st, That the sin here mentioned is not "the sin against the Holy Ghost," which I have heretofore discoursed of, and shewn wherein the particular nature of it does consist. There are three things which do remarkably distinguish the sin here spoken

of in the text, from "the sin against the Holy Ghost" described by our Saviour:—

1st, The persons that are guilty of this sin here in the text, are evidently such as had embraced Christianity, and had taken upon them the profession of it: whereas those whom our Saviour chargeth with "the sin against the Holy Ghost," are such as constantly opposed his doctrine, and resisted the evidence he offered for it.

2dly, The particular nature of "the sin against the Holy Ghost" consisted in blaspheming the Spirit whereby our Saviour wrought his miracles, and saying he did not those things by the Spirit of God, but by the assistance of the devil, in that malicious and unreasonable imputing of the plain effects of the Holy Ghost to the power of the devil, and, consequently, in an obstinate refusal to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought; but here is nothing of all this so much as intimated by the apostle in this place.

3dly, "The sin against the Holy Ghost" is declared to be absolutely "unpardonable both in this world and in that which is to come." But this is not declared to be absolutely unpardonable, which brings me to the

2d thing; namely, That this sin here spoken of by the apostle is not said to be absolutely unpardonable. It is not "the sin against the Holy Ghost;" and, whatever else it be, it is not out of the compass of God's pardon and forgiveness. So our Saviour hath told us, "that all manner of sin whatsoever that men have committed is capable of pardon, excepting only the sin against the Holy Ghost." And though the apostle here uses a very severe expression, that "if such persons fall away, it is im-

possible to renew them again to repentance;" yet I have shewn that there is no necessity of understanding this phrase in the strictest sense of the word impossible; but as it is elsewhere used for that which is extremely difficult. Nor, indeed, will our Saviour's declaration, which I mentioned before, that all sins whatsoever are pardonable, except "the sin against the Holy Ghost," suffer us to understand these words in the most rigorous sense.

3dly, The sin here spoken of is not a partial apostacy from the Christian religion by any particular vicious practice. Whosoever lives in the habitual practice of any sin plainly forbidden by the Christian law, may be said so far to have apostatized from Christianity; but this is not the falling away which the apostle here speaks of. This may be bad enough; and the greater sins any man who professeth himself a Christian lives in, the more notoriously he contradicts his profession, and falls off from Christianity, and the nearer he approaches to the sin in the text, and the danger there threatened; but yet, for all that, this is not that which the apostle speaks of.

4thly, But it is a total apostacy from the Christian religion, more especially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true God, and our Saviour, and the worship of false gods, which the apostle here speaks of. And this will be evident, if we consider the occasion and main scope of this Epistle. And that was to confirm the Jews, who had newly embraced Christianity, in the profession of that religion, and to keep them from apostatizing from it, because of the persecutions and sufferings which attended that profession. It pleased God, when Christianity first appeared in the world, to permit

the powers of the world to raise a vehement persecution against the professors of it, by reason whereof many out of base fear did apostatize from it, and, in testimony of their renouncing it, were forced to sacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the apostle endeavours to caution and arm men against throughout this epistle: (chap. ii. 1.) "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest, at any time, we should fall away." And (chap. iii. 12.) it is called "an evil heart of unbelief to apostatize from the living God.—Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God;" that is, to fall from the worship of the true God to idolatry. And, (chap. x. 23.) "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together;" that is, not declining the assemblies of Christians, for fear of persecution; and (ver. 26.) it is called a "sinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth;" and, (ver. 29.) "a drawing back to perdition." And (chap. xii.) it is called, by way of eminency, "the sin which so easily besets;" the sin which, in those times of persecution, they were so liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the sin which St. John speaks of, and calls "the sin unto death," and does not require Christians "to pray for those who fall into it," with any assurance that it shall be forgiven: (1 John v. 16.) "There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not;" that is, does not fall into the sin of apostacy from Christianity to that of the heathen idolatry;

"but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." And then (ver. 21.) he adds this caution, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Which sufficiently shews what that sin was which he was speaking of before.

So that this being the sin which the apostle designed to caution men against throughout this Epistle, it is very evident what falling away it is he here speaks of; namely, a total apostacy from Christianity, and more especially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly, We will consider the reason of the difficulty of recovering such persons by repentance. "If they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance;" and that for these three reasons:

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin.

2. Because it renounceth, and casteth off the means of recovery.

3. Because it is so high a provocation of God to withdraw his grace from such persons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin, both in the nature and circumstances of it. It is downright apostacy from God, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly persuaded and convinced of it; and so the apostle expresseth it in this Epistle, calling it an "apostacy from the living God, a sinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth." It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being against the clearest light and knowledge, and the fullest conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodness of that religion which he renounceth; against the

greatest obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the gospel; after the free pardon of sins, and the grace and assistance of God's Spirit received, and a miraculous power conferred for a witness and testimony to themselves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the highest affront to the Son of God, who revealed this religion to the world, and sealed it with his blood; and, in effect, an expression of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the Jews were guilty of when they put him to so cruel and shameful a death.

Now a sin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardness and impenitency, or to drive them to despair; and either of these conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both these dangers the apostle warns men of in this Epistle: (chap. iii. 12, 13.) "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to apostatize from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Or else the reflection upon so horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to despair; as it did Judas, who, after he had betrayed the Son of God, could find no ease but by making away with himself; the guilt of so great a sin filled him with such terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himself. And this likewise was the case of Spira, whose apostacy, though it was not total from the Christian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that desperation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewise the apostle admonisheth; (chap. xii. 15.) "Looking di-

ligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God (or, as it is in our margin, 'lest any man fall from the grace of God') lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you;" and then he compares the case of such persons to Esau, who, when he had renounced his birthright, to which the blessing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, rejected, and "found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

2. Those who are guilty of this sin, do renounce and cast off the means of their recovery; and, therefore, it becomes extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance. They reject the gospel, which affords the best arguments and means to repentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and forgiveness. And certainly that man is in a very sad and desperate condition, the very nature of whose disease is to reject the remedy that should cure him. And this the apostle tells us, was the condition of those who apostatized from the gospel: (chap. x. 26, 27.) "For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary." The great sacrifice and propitiation for sin was the Son of God; and they who renounce him, what way of expiation can they hope for afterward? what can they expect but to fall into his hands as a judge, whom they have rejected as a sacrifice and Saviour? And then,

3. Those who are guilty of this sin, provoke God in the highest manner to withdraw his grace and Holy Spirit from them, by the power and efficacy whereof they should be brought to re-

pentance; so that it can hardly otherwise be expected, but that God should leave those to themselves, who have so unworthily forsaken him; and wholly withdraw his grace and Spirit from such persons as have so notoriously offered despite to the Spirit of grace.

I do not say that God always does this, he is sometimes better to such persons than they have deserved from him, and saves those who have done what they can to undo themselves, and mercifully puts forth his hand to recover them who were drawing back to perdition; especially if they were suddenly surprised by the violence of temptation, and yielded to it not deliberately and out of choice, but merely through weakness and infirmity, and so soon as they reflected upon themselves, did return and repent: this was the case of St. Peter, who being surprised with a sudden fear denied Christ; but being admonished of his sin, by the signal which our Saviour had given him, he was recovered by a speedy and hearty repentance. And so likewise several of the primitive Christians, who were at first overcome by fear to renounce their religion, did afterwards recover themselves, and died resolute martyrs; but it is a very dangerous state, out of which but few recover, and with great difficulty.

And thus I have done with the five things I propounded to make out, for the clearing of this text from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about it. I shall now draw some useful inferences from hence by way of application, that we may see how far this doth concern ourselves; and they shall be these:

1st, From the supposition here in the text, that such persons as are there described (namely, those

who have been baptized, and by baptism have received remission of sins, and did firmly believe the gospel, and the promises of it, and were endowed with miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost) that these may fall away: this should caution us all against confidence and security; when those that have gone thus far may fall, "Let him that standeth take heed."

Some are of opinion, that those whom the apostle here describes are true and sincere Christians, and that when he says, "it is impossible, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance," he means, that they cannot fall away totally, so as to stand in need of being renewed again to repentance: but this is directly contrary to the apostle's design, which was to caution Christians against apostacy, because, if they did fall away, their recovery would be so exceeding difficult; which argument does plainly suppose, that they might fall away.

On the other hand, there are others, who think the persons here described by the apostle, to be hypocritical Christians, who, for some base ends, had entertained Christianity, and put on the profession of it, but not being sincere and in good earnest, would forsake it when persecution came. But, besides that this is contrary to the description which the apostle makes of these persons, who are said "to have tasted of the heavenly gift, and to have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost;" by which if we understand justification and remission of sins, and the sanctifying virtue of the Holy Ghost, which in all probability is the meaning of these phrases, these are blessings which did not belong to hypocrites, and which God does not bestow upon them; I say, besides this, there is no reason to ima-

gine that the apostle intended such persons, when it is likely that there were very few hypocrites in those times of persecution; for what should tempt men to dissemble Christianity, when it was so dangerous a profession? or what worldly ends could men have in taking that profession upon them, which was so directly contrary to their worldly interests?

So that, upon the whole matter, I doubt not but the apostle here means those who are real in the profession of Christianity, and that such might fall away. For we may easily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodness of the Christian doctrine, and in good earnest embrace the profession of it, and yet not be so perfectly weaned from the world, and so firmly rooted and established in that persuasion, as, when it came to the trial, to be able to quit all for it, and to bear up against all the terrors and assaults of persecution; so that they might be real Christians, and no hypocrites, though they were not so perfectly established and confirmed, and so sincerely resolved as many others. They were not like St. Paul, and those tried persons whom he speaks of: (Rom. viii. 35. 37.) "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." (They had been tried by all these, and yet had held out.) Upon which he breaks out into those triumphant expressions; "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of

God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." They might not (I say) be like those; and yet for all that be real in their profession of Christianity, and no hypocrites.

In short, I take them to be such as our Saviour describes him to be, " who received the seed into stony places ;" namely, " he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while ; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." This is no description of a hypocrite ; but of one that was real, as far as he went (for he is said to receive the word with joy), but was not well rooted, and come to such a confirmed state, as resolutely to withstand the assaults of persecution.

So that though we have freely embraced Christianity, and are in a good degree sincere in the profession of it, yet there is great reason why we should neither be secure nor confident in ourselves. Not secure, because there is great danger that our resolutions may be borne down one time or other by the assaults of temptation, if we be not continually vigilant, and upon our guard. Not confident in ourselves, because " we stand by faith, and faith is the gift of God ;" therefore, as the apostle infers, " we should not be high-minded, but fear." Men may have gone a great way in Christianity, and have been sincere in the profession of it ; and yet afterwards may apostatize in the foulest manner, not only fall off to a vicious life, but even desert the profession of their religion. I would to God the experience of the world did not give us too much reason to believe the possibility of this. When we see so many revolt from the profession of the re-

formed religion, to the corruptions and superstitions of Rome; and others, from a religious and sober life, to plunge themselves into all kind of lewdness and debauchery, and, it is to be feared, into atheism and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be possible for Christians to fall away? I wish we were as certain of the possibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over ourselves, and according to the apostle's exhortation, (2 Pet. iii. 17.) "Seeing we know these things before, beware lest we also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own steadfastness."

2dly, This shews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to sin against the means of knowledge which the gospel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the sin of these persons was, that after they were once enlightened; that is, at their baptism were instructed in the Christian doctrine, the clearest and most perfect revelation that ever was made of God's will to mankind; that after they were justified freely by God's grace, and had received remission of sins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that, after all this, they should fall off from this holy religion. This was that which did so heighten and inflame their guilt, and made their case so near desperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulness and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed against one that hath obliged us by the greatest favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it against the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuseth; for so far as a man is ignorant of

the evil he does, so far the action is involuntary: but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the sins of Christians, because God hath afforded them the greatest means and opportunities of knowledge; that revelation which God hath made of his will to the world by our blessed Saviour, is the clearest light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the gospel brings are the greatest that ever were offered to the sons of men; the free pardon and remission of all our sins, and the assistance of God's grace and Holy Spirit, to help the weakness of our nature, and enable us to do what God requires of us. So that we who sin after baptism, after the knowledge of Christianity, and those great blessings which the gospel bestows on mankind, are of all persons in the world the most inexcusable. The sins of heathens bear no proportion to ours, because they never enjoyed those means of knowledge, never had those blessings conferred upon them, which Christians are partakers of; so that we may apply to ourselves those severe words of the apostle in this Epistle, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Hear how our Saviour aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulness of them, and their being committed against the express knowledge of God's will: (Luke xii. 47, 48.) "The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." The means and mercies of the gospel are so many talents committed to our trust, of the neglect whereof

a severe account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuse for us, and little hopes of pardon. "If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth (says the apostle in this Epistle), there remains no more sacrifice for sin." I know the apostle speaks this particularly of the sin of apostacy from Christianity; but it is in proportion true of all other sins, which those who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They who, after they have entertained Christianity, and made some progress in it, and been in some measure reformed by it, do again relapse into any vicious course, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. Peter tells us, (2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.) "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." Therefore we may do well to consider seriously what we do, when, under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the gospel affords us, and the inestimable blessings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vicious course. Our sins are not of a common rate, when they have so much of wilfulness and unworthiness in them. If men shall be severely punished for living against the light of nature; what vengeance shall be poured on those who offend against the glorious light of the gospel? "This is the condemnation, that light is come," &c.

3dly, The consideration of what hath been said

is matter of comfort to those, who, upon every failing and infirmity, are afraid they have committed "the unpardonable sin," and that it is impossible for them to be restored by repentance. There are many, who, being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to represent things worse to themselves than there is reason for, and do many times fancy themselves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of those things which in their nature are indifferent, and are apt to aggravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable sin. Most men are apt to extenuate their sins, and not to be sensible enough of the evil and heinousness of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy persons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatsoever they hear and read in Scripture, that is spoken against the grossest and most enormous offenders, they apply to themselves; and when they hear of the "sin against the Holy Ghost, and the sin unto death," or read this text which I am now treating of, they presently conclude that they are guilty of these sins, and that this is a description of their case. Whereas, the sin against the Holy Ghost is of that nature, that probably none but those that saw our Saviour's miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting that, there is no sin whatsoever that is unpardonable. As for "the sin unto death," and that here spoken of in the text, I have shewn that they are a total apostacy from the Christian religion, more especially to the heathen idolatry; which these persons I am speaking of, have no reason to imagine themselves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by Christians may come near to this, and it may be very hard for those who are

guilty of them, to recover themselves again to repentance; yet, to be sure, for the common frailties and infirmities of human nature, there is an open way of pardon in the gospel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; so that upon account of these, which is commonly the case of the persons I am speaking of, there is not the least ground of despair; and though it be hard many times for such persons to receive comfort, yet it is easy to give it, and that upon sure grounds, and as clear evidence of Scripture, as there is for any thing; so that the first thing that such persons, who are so apt to judge thus hardly of themselves, are to be convinced of (if possible) is this—that they ought rather to trust the judgment of others concerning themselves, than their own imagination, which is so distempered, that it cannot make a true representation of things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to persuade people of this; but till they be persuaded of it, I am sure all the reason in the world will signify nothing to them.

4thly, This should make men afraid of great and presumptuous sins, which come near apostacy from Christianity; such as deliberate murder, adultery, gross fraud and oppression, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce Christianity; or, professing to believe it, do in their works deny it? Some of these sins which I have mentioned, particularly murder and adultery, were ranked in the same degree with apostacy by the ancient church; and so severe was the discipline of many churches, that persons guilty of these crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever testimony they gave of their repentance.

I will not say but this was too rigorous; but this shews how inconsistent with Christianity these crimes, and others of the like degree of heinousness, were in those days thought to be. They did not, indeed, as Tertullian tell us, think such persons absolutely incapable of the mercy of God; but after such a fall, so notorious a contradiction to their Christian profession, they thought it unfit afterwards that they should ever be reckoned in the number of Christians.

5thly, It may be useful for us upon this occasion to reflect a little upon the ancient discipline of the church, which in some places (as I have told you) was so severe, as, in case of some great crimes after baptism, as apostacy to the heathen idolatry, murder, and adultery, never to admit those that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church: but all churches were so strict, as not to admit those who fell, after baptism, into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious course of penance, after the greatest and most public testimonies of sorrow and repentance, after long fasting and tears, and the greatest signs of humiliation that can be imagined. In case of the greatest offences, they were seldom reconciled, till they came to lie upon their deathbeds: and, in case of other scandalous sins, not till after the humiliation of many years. This, perhaps, may be thought too great severity; but I am sure we are as much too remiss now, as they were over rigorous then: but were the ancient discipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what case would the generality of Christians be in? In what herds and shoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church? It is true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of Christians hath long

since broke these bounds, and it is morally impossible to revive the strictness of the ancient discipline, in any measure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with shame and confusion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and sadly to consider, how few among us would in those days have been accounted Christians; and upon this consideration to be provoked to an emulation of those better times, and to a reformation of those faults and miscarriages, which, in the best days of Christianity, were reckoned inconsistent with the Christian profession; and to remember, that though the discipline of the church be not now the same it was then, yet the judgment and severity of God is; and that those who live in any vicious course of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they shall be shut out of the kingdom of God. "We are sure that the judgment of God will be according to truth, against them which commit such things."

6thly, and lastly, The consideration of what hath been said, should confirm and establish us in the profession of our holy religion. It is true, we are not now in danger of apostatizing from Christianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many sad examples of those who apostatize from the profession of the gospel, which they have taken upon them in baptism, to atheism and infidelity, to all manner of impiety and lewdness. There are many who daily fall off from the profession of the reformed religion, to the gross errors and superstitions of the Roman church, which in many things does too nearly resemble the old pagan idolatry. And what the apostle here says of the apostates of his time, is proportionably true of those of our days, that "they

who thus fall away," it is "extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance." And it ought to be remembered, that the guilt of this kind of apostacy hath driven some to despair; as in the case of Spira, who, for resisting the light and conviction of his mind, was cast into those agonies, and filled with such terrors, as if the very pains of hell had taken hold on him; and in that fearful despair, and in the midst of those horrors, he breathed out his soul.

"Let us then hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;" and let us take heed how we contradict the profession of our faith, by any impiety and wickedness in our lives; remembering, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." I will conclude with the words of the apostle immediately after the text, "The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned." And how gladly would I add the next words! "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak."

SERMON CXXI.

CHRIST THE AUTHOR, AND OBEDIENCE THE CONDITION OF SALVATION.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.—HEB. v. 9.

THIS is spoken of Christ, our great high-priest under the gospel; upon the excellency of whose person, and the efficacy of his sacrifice for the eternal benefit and salvation of mankind, the apostle insists so largely in this and the following chapters; but the sum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our high-priest, "being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him."

In which words we have these four things considerable:

1st, The great blessing and benefit here spoken of; and that is, eternal salvation; and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal misery, but the obtaining of eternal life and happiness for us.

2dly, The author of this great blessing and benefit to mankind; and that is, Jesus Christ, the Son of God; who is here represented to us under the notion of our high-priest, who, by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to God, is said to be the author of eternal salvation to mankind.

3dly, The way and means whereby he became

the author of our salvation; "being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation." The word is τελειωθεὶς, having consummated his work, and finished his course, and received the reward of it. For this word hath an allusion to those that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the apostle plainly alludes, Phil. iii. 12. where he says, "not as though I had already attained," οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am pressing, or reaching forward towards it; ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, "or were already perfect:" that is, not as if I had finished my course, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am pressing forward towards it. In like manner, our blessed Saviour, when he had finished the course of his humiliation and obedience, which was accomplished in his sufferings, and had received the reward of them, being risen from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, and crowned with glory and honour, he is said to be τελειωθεὶς, made perfect; and therefore, when he was giving up the ghost upon the cross, he said, (John xix. 30.) τετέλεσται, "it is finished," or perfected; that is, he had done all that was necessary to be done by way of suffering for our redemption. And the same word is likewise used (Luke xiii. 32.) concerning our Saviour's sufferings; "I do cures to-day and to-morrow, καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι, and the third day I shall be perfected;" this he spake concerning his own death. And, therefore, (chap. ii. 10.) God is said "to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings;" Διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι. And thus our high-priest, being "made perfect" in this sense; that is, having finished his course, which was accomplished in his sufferings, and having received the reward of them in

being exalted at the right hand of God, " he became the author of eternal salvation to us."

4thly, You have here the qualification of the persons who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is suspended, and that is obedience ; " he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him."

These are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof I shall take into consideration these five things :

1st, How and by what means, Christ is the " author of our salvation."

2dly, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, We will consider the possibility of performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offered, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

And, 5thly, I shall shew that this is no prejudice to the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God, declared in the gospel.

1st, We will consider how and by what means Christ is the author of our salvation ; and this is contained in these words, " being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation ;" that is, (as I told you before) having finished his course, which was accomplished in his last sufferings ; and having received the reward of them, being exalted at the right hand of God, " he became the author of eternal salvation" to us ; so that, by all he did and suffered for us, in the days of his flesh, and in the state of his humiliation, and by all that he still continues

to do for us now that he is in heaven at the right hand of God; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our salvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and sufferings, his resurrection from the dead, and his powerful intercession for us at the right hand of God, have all a great influence upon the reforming and saving of mankind; and by all these ways and means he is the author and cause of our salvation; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a price and propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cause, and interceding with God on our behalf, for mercy and grace to help in time of need.

And, indeed, our condition required a high-priest who was qualified in all these respects for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate state into which it was sunk; a high-priest "whose lips should preserve knowledge," and from whose mouth we might learn the law of God; whose life should be a perfect pattern of holiness to us, and his death a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and by whose grace and assistance we should be endowed with power and strength to mortify our lusts, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God; and, therefore, "such a high-priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who might have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and being himself compassed with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, being in all points tempted as we are, only without sin;" and in a word, "might be able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

By these qualifications our high-priest is de-

scribed in this Epistle; and by these he is every way suited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and necessities; to instruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteousness by his most holy and most exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our sins by his death; and to procure grace and assistance for us by his prevalent intercession on our behalf. By all these ways, and in all these respects, he is said to be "the author of eternal salvation."

1st, By the holiness and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly instructed in the will of God and our duty, and powerfully excited and persuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obscure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in comparison of what they are now rendered by the revelation of the gospel. The general corruption of mankind, and the vicious practice of the world, had in a great measure blurred and defaced the natural law; so that the heathen world, for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, especially as to several instances of it. The custom of several vices had so prevailed among mankind, as almost quite to extinguish the natural sense of their evil and deformity. And the Jews, who enjoyed a considerable degree of Divine revelation, had no strict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themselves with some kind of outward conformity to the bare letter of the ten commandments, were almost wholly taken up with little ceremonies and observances, in which they placed the main of their religion, almost wholly neglecting the greater duties and weightier matters of the law.

And therefore, our blessed Saviour, to free mankind from these wanderings and uncertainties about the will of God, revealed the moral law, and explained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all doubts, and supplying all the defects of it, by a more particular and explicit declaration of the several parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater perfection than the world was sufficiently acquainted withal before; of greater humility and more universal charity; of abstaining from revenge and forgiving injuries, and returning to our enemies good for evil, and love for ill-will, and blessings and prayers for curses and persecutions. These virtues, indeed, were sometimes, and yet but very rarely, recommended before in the councils of wise men; but either not in that degree of perfection, or not under that degree of necessity, and as having the force of laws, and laying an universal obligation of indispensable duty upon all mankind.

And as our blessed Saviour hath given a greater clearness, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule of our duty, so he hath revealed, and brought into a clearer light, more powerful motives and encouragements to the constant and careful practice of it; "for life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel;" the resurrection of Christ from the dead being a plain and convincing demonstration of the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, and an evidence to us both of his power, and of the fidelity of his promise, to raise us from the dead. Not but that mankind had some obscure apprehensions of these things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life, and future rewards in another world; and the worst of men were not without some fears of the judgment and vengeance of

another world; but men had disputed themselves into great doubts and uncertainties about these things; and as men that are in doubt, and almost indifferent which way they go; so the uncertain apprehensions which men had of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments of another world, had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that pressing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of these things would have infused into them.

But now the light of the glorious gospel of Christ hath scattered all these clouds, and chased away that gross darkness which hid the other world from our sight, and hath removed all doubts concerning the immortality of men's souls, and their future state; and now "the kingdom of heaven," with all its treasures of life, and happiness, and glory, lies open to our view, and "hell is also naked before us, and destruction hath no covering." So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awakened, and all sorts of considerations that may serve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are exposed to the view of all men, and do stare every man's conscience in the face. And this is that which renders the gospel so admirable and powerful an instrument for the reforming of mankind, and, as the apostle calls it, the "mighty power of God unto salvation;" because therein life and immortality are set before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and therein also "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." So that, considering the perfection of our rule, and the

powerful enforcements of it upon the consciences of men, by the clear discovery and firm assurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagined better suited to its end than the doctrine of the gospel is to make men wise, and holy, and good unto salvation; both by instructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2dly, The example of our Saviour's life is likewise another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more easy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we see obedience to the Divine law practised in our own nature, and performed by a man like ourselves, "in all things like unto us, sin only excepted." It is true, indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and seems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this example. No wonder if he that was without sin, and was God as well as man, performed all righteousness; and therefore, where is the encouragement of this example? That our nature, pure and uncorrupted, supported and assisted by the divinity to which it was united, should be perfectly conformed to the law of God, as it is no strange thing, so neither doth it seem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example more suited to our weakness might have had. But then this cannot be denied, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aspiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn how God would have men to live, than by seeing how God himself lived

when he was pleased to assume our nature, and to become man.

And then, we are to consider, that the Son of God did not assume our nature in its highest glory and perfection, but compassed with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but still it was without sin; and therefore God doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we should fulfil all righteousness, as he did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleased to accept of our sincere, though very imperfect obedience. But after all this, his human nature was united to the divinity, and he had the "Spirit without measure;" and this would, indeed, make a wide difference between us and our pattern, as to the purpose of holiness and obedience, if we were destitute of that assistance which is necessary to enable us to the discharge of our duty; but this God offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promised "to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him;" and "the Spirit of him that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead" dwells in all good men, who sincerely desire to do the will of God; "in the working out our salvation, God worketh in us both to will and to do."

So that as to that obedience which the gospel requires of us, if we be not wanting to ourselves, if we do not "receive the grace of God in vain," and "quench and resist his blessed Spirit," we may be as really assisted as the Son of God himself was; for, in this respect, all true and sincere Christians are the sons of God; so that St. Paul tells us, (Rom. viii. 14.) "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

So that, if all things be duly considered, the life of our blessed Saviour, as it is the most perfect, so, in the main, it is a very proper pattern for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a complete and absolute pattern. The Son of God condescended to every thing that might render him the most familiar and equal example to us, excepting that, which, as it was impossible, so had been infinitely dishonourable to him, and would have spoiled the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or possible, "being in all things like unto us, sin only excepted;" that is, abating that one thing, which he came to destroy and abolish, and which would have destroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been without sin, he could neither have made an expiation for sin, nor have been a perfect pattern of holiness and obedience.

And as the life of our blessed Saviour had all the perfection that is requisite to an absolute pattern (so that, by considering his temper and spirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vicious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitances of our passions, and the errors and irregularities of our lives), so it is a very powerful example, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of it; for it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reason to love, above any person in the world: the example of our Prince and sovereign Lord, of our best friend and greatest benefactor, of the high-priest of our profession, and the Captain of our salvation, of the author and finisher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our sakes, and was contented to assume our

nature, together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reason but that he might have the opportunity to instruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from sin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happiness. It is the example of one who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us in his blood, and whilst we were enemies, did and suffered more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And surely these considerations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this "example of our Lord and Saviour." We are ambitious to imitate those whom we highly esteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindnesses and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like those whom we love, and are apt to conform ourselves to the will and pleasure of those from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that, whether we consider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindness which he hath expressed towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the steps of the Son of God, and of the best friend that the sons of men ever had? Who would not follow that example to which we stand indebted for the greatest blessings and benefits that ever were procured for mankind? Thus you see of what force and advantage the example of our blessed Saviour is toward the recovery and salvation of mankind.

3dly, He is "the author of eternal salvation,"

as he hath purchased it for us, by the " merit of his obedience and sufferings," by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happiness. When, by our sins, we had justly incurred the wrath and displeasure of Almighty God, and were liable to eternal death and misery, he was contented to be substituted a sacrifice for us, " to bear our sins in his own body on the tree," and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own sufferings. He died for us, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and stead: so that if he had not died, we had eternally perished; and because he died, we are saved from that eternal ruin and punishment which was due to us for our sins.

And this, though it be no where in Scripture called by the name or term of satisfaction, yet, which is the same thing in effect, it is called the price of our redemption; for, as we are sinners, we are liable and indebted to the justice of God, and our blessed Saviour, by his death and sufferings, hath discharged this obligation; which discharge, since it was obtained for us by the shedding of his precious blood, without which, the Scripture expressly says, "there had been no remission of sin," why it may not properly enough be called payment and satisfaction, I confess I cannot understand. Not that God was angry with his Son, for he was always well pleased with him; or that our Saviour suffered the very same which the sinner should have done in his own person, the proper pains and torments of the damned; but that his perfect obedience and grievous sufferings, undergone for our sakes, and upon our account, were of that value and esteem with God, and

his voluntary sacrifice of himself in our stead so highly acceptable and well pleasing to him, that he thereupon was pleased to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promised and engaged himself to forgive the sins of all those who sincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of Christ, which was shed for us upon the cross, is called "the blood of the covenant;" as being the sanction of that new covenant of the gospel, into which God is entered with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very foundation of it; for which reason, the cup in the Lord's supper (which represents to us the blood of Christ) is called "the new testament in his blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins."

4thly, and lastly, Christ is said to be the author of our salvation, in respect of his powerful and perpetual intercession for us at the right hand of God. And this seems to be more especially intimated and intended, in that expression here in the text, that "being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him." Which words, of his being perfected, do, as I have shewed before, more immediately refer to his sufferings, and the reward that followed them, his exaltation at the right hand of God, where "he lives for ever to make intercession for us;" by which perpetual and most prevalent intercession of his, he procures all those benefits to be bestowed upon us, which he purchased for us by his death; the forgiveness of our sins, and our acceptance with God, and perfect restitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit to enable us to a sincere discharge of our duty, to strengthen us

against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our apostle calls "obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need," (chap. iv. ver. 16. of this Epistle.) Our blessed Saviour, now that he is advanced into heaven, and "exalted on the right hand of the Majesty on high," doth, out of the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind, still prosecute that great and merciful design of our salvation which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings does offer up our prayers to God, and as it were plead our cause with God, and represent to him all our wants and necessities, and obtain a favourable answer of our petitions put up to God in his name, and all necessary supplies of grace and strength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful intercession of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer, our sins are pardoned upon our sincere repentance, our prayers are graciously answered, our wants are abundantly supplied, and the grace and assistance of God's Spirit are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to strengthen us in well-doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to support us under the greatest trials and sufferings, and "to keep us through faith unto salvation."

And for this reason, as the purchasing of our salvation is in Scripture attributed to the death and sufferings of Christ; so the perfecting and finishing of it is ascribed to the prevalency of his intercession at the right hand of God for us. So the apostle tells us, (chap. vii. 25.) that "he is able to save to the ut-

termost all those that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." He died once to purchase salvation for us; and that we may not fall short of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchase, "he lives for ever to make intercession for us," and thus "he saves to the uttermost all those that come to God by him;" that is, he takes care of the whole business of our salvation from first to last. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happiness, and as tenderly concerned for us, as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the cross, and "poured out his soul an offering for our sins;" for he appears at the right hand of God in our nature, that which he assumed for our sakes, which was made subject to, and sensible of our infirmities, and which "was tempted in all things like as we are, only without sin;" and, therefore, "he knows how to pity" and succour "them that are tempted;" and from the remembrance of his own sufferings, is prompted to a compassionate sense of ours, and never ceaseth in virtue of his blood, which was shed for us, to plead our cause with God, and to intercede powerfully in our behalf.

So that the virtue and efficacy of Christ's intercession on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us by his blood and sufferings; which, being entered into heaven, he represents to God on our behalf. As the high-priest, under the law, did enter into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people; "so Christ, by his own blood, entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;" as the apostle speaks, (chap. ix. 12.) He en-

tered into "the holy place;" that is, "into heaven itself," to make intercession for us, as the apostle explains himself: (ver. 24.) "Christ is not entered into the holy places which are made with hands, but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us." And, (chap. x. ver. 12.) speaking of Christ's appearing for us at the right hand of God, "this man (says he) after he had offered one sacrifice for sin for ever (that is, a sacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) sat down at the right hand of God;" that is, to intercede for us in virtue of that sacrifice.

From all which it appears, that the virtue of Christ's mediation and intercession for us in heaven is founded in his sacrifice, and the price of our redemption, which he paid on earth, in shedding his blood for us.

From whence the apostle reasons, "that there is but one mediator between God and man," by whom we are to address our prayers to God: (1 Tim. ii. 5.) "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." His mediation is founded in his ransom, or the price which he paid for our redemption, The apostle, indeed, does not say there is "but one mediator" between God and man in express words, but surely he means so; if by saying "there is one God," he means "there is but one God," for they are joined together, and the very same expression used concerning both: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men;" that is, there is "but one God" and "one mediator." But then, they of the church of Rome endeavour to avoid this plain text, by distinguishing between a mediator of redemption, and a mediator of inter-

cession; but now, if Christ's mediation, by way of intercession, be founded in the virtue of his redemption; then if there be but one mediator of redemption, then there is but one mediator of intercession in heaven for us. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all." So that the power and prevalency of his intercession is founded in his ransom; that is, the price of our redemption; in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with God for us, as the apostle to the Hebrews does most plainly assert. So that all other intercessors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and presenting our prayers to God, besides our high-priest, "who is at the right hand of God, and lives for ever, to make intercession for us," and by virtue of his intercession "is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him;" that is, who put up their prayers to God in the alone virtue of his mediation. So that there is no need of any other, if his intercession be available "to save to the uttermost:" so there is great danger in applying to any other (whether saint or angel, or even the blessed Virgin) if the benefit of his intercession be limited to those "who come to God by him." And thus I have shewn by what means Christ is "the author of our salvation;" which was the first thing proposed to be considered. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed to inquire into; namely, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation. And this I shall explain, first negatively, and then positively.

1st, negatively: It is not a mere outward profession of the Christian religion, and owning of

Christ for our Lord and lawgiver, that will be accepted in this case. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, (saith our Saviour) shall enter into the kingdom of God." By which we may very reasonably understand, all that profession of religion which falls short of obedience and a holy life; as, the profession of faith in Christ, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our Lord and Saviour; no, nor the external worship of him, and profession of subjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word, and communicating in the holy sacrament. No, though this be set off in the most glorious manner, by prophesying and working miracles in his name; for so it follows in the next words: "Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works? We have eat and drunk in thy presence, and have heard thee preach in our streets." But he tells us, that nothing of all this, without obedience to his laws, will be sufficient to gain us admission into heaven.

2dly, positively: That which God requires as a condition and will accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal life, is faith in Christ, and a sincere and universal obedience to the precepts of his holy gospel. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of God: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." And here in the text it is expressly said, that "Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him," τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ, to them that hearken to him; that is, to them that do so hear and believe his gospel, as to obey it; to

them, and no other, he is "the author of eternal salvation."

And, that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand what obedience it is, which the gospel exacts as an indispensable condition of eternal salvation, and a necessary qualification in all those who hope to be made partakers of it, we may be pleased to consider, that there is a virtual and an actual obedience to the laws of God, a perfect and sincere obedience to them; the explication of these terms will give us a distinct conception of the things we are speaking of.

1st, There is a virtual, and there is an actual obedience to the laws of God. By an actual obedience, I mean the practice and exercise of the several graces and virtues of Christianity in the course and tenor of a holy life; when "out of a good conversation men do shew forth their works;" and, by the outward actions of their lives, do give real testimony of their piety, justice, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, and all other Christian graces and virtues, as occasion is ministered for the practice and exercise of them.

By a virtual obedience, I mean a sincere belief of the gospel, of the holiness and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promises, and the terror of its threatenings, and a true repentance for all our sins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who sincerely believes the gospel, and does truly repent of the errors and miscarriages of his life, is firmly resolved to obey the commandments of God, and to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life; so that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's actual obedience to the laws of God, in the course of a holy and good

life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the case of those who, upon the hearing of the gospel when it was first preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their sins, and the worship of idols, to the true and living God, but perhaps were cut off soon after; (as there were many who, being but newly gained to Christianity, were presently put to death, and suffered martyrdom for that profession;) there is no doubt to be made but that, in this case, a virtual obedience was in such persons a sufficient qualification for eternal life.

But where there is time and opportunity for the exercise of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there actual obedience to the laws and precepts of the gospel is necessary to qualify us for eternal happiness; so that, though a man do sincerely believe the gospel, and truly repent of his sins, and resolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards in the course of his life put this resolution in practice, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance and amendment of life," and persevere in a holy course, his first resolution of obedience, though it were sincere, will not avail him to salvation. Nay, if he should continue for some time in the resolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and "turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him, his latter end would be worse than his beginning; all his righteousness that he hath done would not be remembered; he should die in his iniquity." For "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." If "any man draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in him." This is so very clear and plain from Scripture, that no man can entertain a con-

trary persuasion without contradicting the whole tenor of the Bible.

The sum of what I have said is this; that a virtual obedience and sincere faith and repentance are sufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for actual obedience, and the practice of a holy life: but where there is opportunity for actual obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perseverance therein; they are indispensably necessary in order to our eternal salvation, and a well-grounded hope and assurance of it.

2dly, There is a perfect, and there is a sincere obedience. Perfect obedience consists in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of God, without the least imperfection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not consistent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our present state, so neither doth God require it of us as a necessary condition of eternal life. We are, indeed, commanded to be "perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect;" but we are not to understand this strictly and rigorously; for that is not only impossible to men in this present state of imperfection, but absolutely impossible to human nature, for men to be perfect, as God is perfect; but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we should imitate those Divine perfections of goodness, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like God in all these as we can, and be still aspiring after a nearer resemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who considers the connexion and occasion of these words.

By a sincere obedience, I mean such a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of God, as to the general course and tenor of them, that we do not

live in the habitual practice of any known sin, or in the customary neglect of any material or considerable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the single act of heinous and notorious sins, as I have formerly explained this matter more at large in another discourse. And this obedience, even in the best of men, is mixed with great frailty and imperfection; but yet, because it is the utmost that we can do in this state of infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the gospel are so merciful and gracious, as that God is pleased, for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, to accept this sincere, though imperfect obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate disputes, and infinite controversies about this business, is the true and clear state of the matter.

And this sincere obedience, which the gospel requires of us as a condition of our happiness, though it be sometimes called by divines, evangelical perfection; yet it is but very improperly so called; for nothing is properly perfect to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections must needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the best and holiest men upon earth; and they who pretend to perfection in this life, do neither understand the law of God nor themselves, but (as St. John says of such persons) "they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them;" and, besides other imperfections, these two are evident in them—ignorance and pride.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this second particular; namely, what obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, for eternal life.

SERMON CXXII.

THE POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY OF GOSPEL OBEDIENCE, AND ITS CONSISTENCE WITH FREE GRACE.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.—HEB. v. 9.

FOR the explication of these words, I proposed to consider these five things:

1st, How and by what means Christ is the author of our salvation.

2dly, What obedience the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3dly, The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offered, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4thly, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

5thly, The consistency of this method and means of our salvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel.

I have handled the two first of these, and now proceed to the

Third thing I proposed to consider; viz. The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offered, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel. For if Christ be the author of eternal salvation only to those who obey him, then those who live in disobedience to the gospel, are in a state of damnation. But there cannot

be the guilt of disobedience, where obedience is impossible; no man being guilty, or justly liable to punishment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways possible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the gospel, into which God has entered with mankind, doth necessarily suppose the possibility of performing the condition of it; otherwise it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, because it only offers new blessings and benefits to us, but sets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if so be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impossible to us; nay, it renders our state many degrees worse, if our not performing the condition of such gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be said, that some few persons have great benefit by it, because they, by an especial and effectual grace, shall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a mighty straitening to the grace and mercy of the gospel, to confine it within so narrow a compass, as still to leave the greatest part of mankind in a worse condition, than if salvation had never been offered to them? as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does necessarily suppose) the guilt and punishment of men shall be greatly increased and heightened by their contempt of, and disobedience to, the gospel; when, at the same time, it is acknowledged, that it was not possible for those men to obey it, for want of that special and effectual grace, which is necessary to enable them thereto. I do not love to handle these points contentiously; but this in my apprehension does as much derogate from the amplitude and riches of God's grace in the gospel, as any thing that can easily be said.

And therefore, for the right stating and clearing of this matter, I shall endeavour to make out these three things:

1. That we are not sufficient of ourselves, and by any power in us, to perform the conditions of the gospel.

2. That the grace of God is ready to enable and assist us to the performance of these conditions, if we be not wanting to ourselves.

3. That what the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves, that may properly be said to be possible to us, and, in some sense, in our power.

1. That we are not sufficient of ourselves, and by any power in us, to perform the conditions of the gospel. The grace of God doth clearly appear in the whole business of our salvation: "By grace ye are saved (says the apostle), and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Faith is the gift of God, and so is repentance. "It is God that works in us both to will and to do of his own goodness;" that is, who both inclines and excites us to that which is good, and enables us to do it. "Without me (says Christ) ye can do nothing;" and "through Christ strengthening me (saith St. Paul) I am able to do all things;" all things which God requires of us, and expects to be done by us in order to our salvation. Without the grace of Christ, "we are without strength; and are not sufficient of ourselves, as of ourselves, to think a good thought;" that is, we are not sufficient of ourselves to design or resolve upon any thing that is good; but our sufficiency is of God.

The depravation of our nature hath brought a great impotency and disability upon us to that

which is good ; and we have made ourselves much weaker by evil practice ; by the power of evil habits, we are enslaved to our lusts, and " sold under sin." So that if, at any time, we are convinced of our duty, and from that conviction, have an inclination to that which is good, " evil is present to us." When the law of God gives us the knowledge of our duty, and stares our consciences in the face, " there is another law in our members, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members." Sin brings us under the power of Satan, and gives him dominion over us. " For his servants ye are whom ye obey ;" so that he rules and bears sway in us, and " we are led captive by him at his pleasure." Evil and vicious habits are a kind of second nature superinduced upon us, which takes away our power and liberty to that which is good, and renders it impossible to us to raise and rescue ourselves ; so that we are prisoners and captives, till the Son of God sets us free : and dead in trespasses and sins, till he gives us life. And therefore the prophet represents the recovery of ourselves from the bondage of sin, by such things as are naturally impossible, to shew how great our weakness and impotency is : (Jer. xiii. 23.) " Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil." And by how much stronger the chains of our sins are, and the more unable we are to break loose from them : by so much the greater and more evident is the necessity of the Divine assistance, and of the power of God's grace, to knock off those fetters, and to rescue us from this bondage and slavery.

2. The grace of God is ready to assist and enable

us to the performance of these conditions; that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purposes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to ourselves, and do not reject or neglect to make use of that grace which God offers us, and is ready to afford us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the gospel effectual (if it be not our own fault, and wilful neglect) to the great end and design of our salvation; and, without this, all the gracious offers of the gospel would signify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this, likewise, is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and disobedience of men utterly inexcusable, because nothing of all this does proceed from want of power, but of will to do better. And therefore this is so necessary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men should be assured of God's readiness to assist and help them in the doing of their duty; that, without this, the revelation of the gospel, though never so clear, would signify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the most vehement persuasions and exhortations to obedience, would have no force and life in them; for what signifies it to direct the dead, and speak to them that cannot hear, and to persuade men, though it were with all the earnestness in the world, to those things which it is impossible for them to do?

Therefore our blessed Saviour, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holiness and virtue in his sermon upon the Mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and proposing to them, he assures them that God is ready to afford his grace and assistance to all those that are sincerely desirous to do his will, and do earnestly im-

plore his grace and assistance to that purpose. (Matt. vii. 7—11.) "Ask (saith he) and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." So that if any man want the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, it is his own fault; it is either for want of seeking, or for want of earnestness in asking; for our Saviour expressly assures us that he denies it to none; "for every one that asketh receiveth."

And to give us a more lively and sensible assurance of this, he represents the care and kindness of God to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who, though they be many times evil themselves, yet are not wont to deny their children necessary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands: "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" Here is a general promise and declaration, that, upon our humble and earnest prayer to God, he will grant us whatever is good and necessary; by which is certainly intended, in the first place, spiritual good things, because these are the best and most necessary; and to satisfy us that our Saviour did, in the first place, and more especially, mean these, St. Luke does particularly instance in the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit: (Luke xi. 13.) "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? The Holy Spirit;" that is, the continual

presence and influence of it to all the purposes of guidance and direction, of grace and assistance, of comfort and support in our Christian course.

And what else is the meaning of that parable of our Saviour's concerning the talents entrusted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, (Matt. xxv.) I say, what else can be the meaning of it but this: that God is beforehand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and such a measure of grace and assistance to that end, which, if he faithfully improve, he shall be admitted "into the joy of his Lord."

And upon this consideration of the gracious promises of the gospel to this purpose, it is, that the apostle St. Paul doth so earnestly exhort Christians to endeavour after the highest degree of universal holiness and purity, that we are capable of in this life: (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." And so likewise, (Phil. ii. 12, 13.) "Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; (that is, with great care and concernment, lest you should fall short of it) for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure." The consideration of God's readiness to assist us, and of his grace which is always at hand to stir up our wills to that which is good, and to strengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmost endeavours, and so co-operate with the grace of God toward our own salvation.

And the apostle St. Peter useth the same argu-

ment to press men to use their utmost "diligence, to make their calling and election sure," by abounding in all the virtues of a good life: (2 Pet. i. 3, 4.) "According as his Divine power hath given us all things which pertain to life and godliness, (that is, hath so plentifully furnished us with all the requisites to a godly life) through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; (that is, by knowledge of the gospel and the grace therein offered to us) whereby he hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." And then, from the consideration of this Divine power, conveyed to us by the gospel, and the promises of it, he exhorts men "to give all diligence, to add to their faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly love, and charity."

And, indeed, the Scripture every where ascribes our regeneration and sanctification, the beginning, and progress, and perseverance of our obedience, to the powerful grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit; we are said to be "regenerated and born again of the Spirit, to be renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, to be led by the Spirit, and by the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh," and, in a word, to be "kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation."

3. What the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to ourselves, may properly be said to be possible to us, and in some sense in our power. That may be said to be possible to us, which though we cannot do of ourselves, as of ourselves, (that is, by our own natural power) yet we

can do by the help and assistance of another, if that assistance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are sure the grace of God's Holy Spirit is, because he hath promised it to them that seek it, and "he is faithful who hath promised."

That cannot be said to be wholly out of any man's power, which he may have for asking; that which we are able to do by the strength and assistance of another, is not impossible to us. Surely, St. Paul did no ways derogate from the grace of God, when he said, "I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me;" he reckons himself able to do all that which by the strength of Christ he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the persuasions and exhortations, which we meet with in Scripture, to holiness and obedience; which would all be, not only to no purpose, but very unreasonable, if we were wholly destitute of power to do what God commands: but if he be always ready at hand to assist us by a grace sufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our salvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall short of eternal salvation, it is wholly our own fault; it is not because God is wanting to us in those aids and assistances of his grace which are necessary; but because we are wanting to ourselves, in not seeking God's grace more earnestly, or by neglecting to make use of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendering of our disobedience inexcusable, whether we be able of ourselves to perform the condition of the gospel, or God be ready to assist us by his grace and Holy Spirit to that purpose.

Wherefore, as the apostle exhorts, (Heb. xii. 12—15.) "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God;" intimating, that it is want of care and diligence, on our part, if the grace of God fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purposes of faith and repentance, and obedience. God does not withhold his grace from us; but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make use of it. And thus I have done with the third thing I proposed to consider from these words. I proceed to the

Fourth; viz. To consider the necessity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happiness. "Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him;" that is, to such, and only to such, as live in obedience to the precepts of his holy gospel, to them who frame the general course of their lives according to his laws. Some men seem to be so afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loath to assert the necessity of them, and do it with so much caution, as if they were not thoroughly persuaded of it, or did apprehend some dangerous consequences of it; but this fear is perfectly groundless; as if merit could not be excluded, without casting off our duty, and releasing ourselves from any necessary obligation to be good. For any man, surely, may easily discern a plain difference between a worthiness of desert, and a fitness of receiving a rebel, being penitent and sorry for what he hath done; though he cannot deserve a pardon, yet he may

thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obstinate rebel, and one that persists in his disloyalty, is not. This is a thing so plain of itself, that it would be waste of time and words to insist longer upon the proof of it.

Now the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness, relies upon these three grounds:

1st, Upon the constitution and appointment of God.

2dly, The general reason of rewards.

3dly, Upon the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience.

1st, The constitution and appointment of God. "Eternal life is the gift of God;" and he may do what he will with his own; he may dispense his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaseth; and therefore, if he have plainly declared, that "to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality," he will give eternal life; that, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" but if we have our "fruit unto holiness," our end shall be everlasting life; who shall resist his will, or dispute his pleasure? The right and authority of God in this matter is so unquestionable, that it admits of no contest; and the blessings and benefits proposed are so infinitely great and invaluable, that no condition of obtaining them, which is possible to be performed by us, can be thought hard and unequal; so that we ought thankfully to receive so great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will; and if there were no other reason for the imposing of these conditions

upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience, but merely the will and pleasure of God, this were enough to silence all objections against it.

But, 2dly, The necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life, is likewise founded in the reason of rewards in general. For though the measure and degree of our reward, so infinitely beyond the proportion of our best duty and service, as eternal life and happiness is; I say, though the measure and degree of this reward be founded in the immense bounty and goodness of God, yet the reason of reward in general is necessarily founded in our obedience to God's laws; for, according to the true nature and reason of things, nothing but obedience is capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and transgression of laws, and remit the punishment due thereto, yet to reward the contempt of laws, and wilful disobedience to them, is directly contrary to the design of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reason and end of all laws, and makes obedience and disobedience to be all one; if so be they are equally capable of reward: and therefore nothing can be more absurd and senseless, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by God, who does not live in a sincere obedience to his laws. "Every man that hath this hope in him, (that is, in Jesus Christ, to be saved by him) purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life: and nothing, surely, can be more unreasonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great Governor and Judge of the world, if we be disobedient to his laws; for where obedience to law is refused, there all reason, and equity, and reward ceaseth. No wise prince can

think fit to reward disloyalty and contempt of his laws; because to reward it, would be to encourage it; much less will God, the great and infinitely wise Governor of the world.

Thirdly, The necessity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience. The happiness of heaven, which is the reward promised in the gospel, is described to us by the sight and enjoyment of God. Now to render us capable of this blessed reward, it is necessary that we be like God; but nothing but obedience and holiness, and being "renewed after the image of him who created us in righteousness," can make us like to God. For he that would be like God, must be holy, and just, and good, and patient, and merciful, as God is; and this alone can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God; for unless we "be like him," we cannot "see him as he is;" and if we should be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleasure and happiness in communion with him. "Blessed are the pure in heart, (says our Saviour) for they shall see God." "Without holiness, (says the apostle) no man shall see the Lord." And, indeed, it is in the very nature of the things impossible, that a wicked man (whilst he remains so) should ever be happy, because there can be no agreeable and delightful society between those that are of a quite contrary temper and disposition to one another, between him "who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and a sinful and impure creature. For "what fellowship (saith the apostle) can righteousness have with unrighteousness? what communion hath light with darkness, or God with Belial?" that is, with the

wicked and disobedient. Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy society between him and us; we could neither delight ourselves in God, nor he take any pleasure in us; for "he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him. The wicked shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity." It cannot be otherwise, but that there must be an eternal jarring and discord between the righteous and holy God, and wicked and unrighteous men. "I will behold thy face (says David) in righteousness." There is no looking God in the face, upon any other terms. If we have been workers of iniquity, God will cast us out of his sight, and in great anger bid us to "depart from him;" and we also shall desire him to depart from us, being unable to bear the sight of him.

So that there is great reason why holiness and obedience should be made the conditions of eternal life and happiness, since, in the very nature of the thing, it is so necessary a qualification for the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, who to us is the cause and fountain of happiness. I come, in the

Fifth and last place, To shew that this method and means of our salvation, is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel. The gospel is called "the law of faith," and "the law of grace," in opposition to the Jewish dispensation, which is called "the law," or "covenant of works," because it consisteth so much in external rites and observances, which were but "types and shadows of good things to come," (as the apostle calls them, in this Epistle,)

and which, when they were come, that law did expire of itself, and was out of date, the obligation and observance of it was no longer necessary; but a better covenant, which was established upon better promises, came in the place of it, and men were justified by faith; that is, by sincerely embracing the Christian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and servile, and imperfect dispensation, which consisted in circumcision, and in almost an endless number of external ceremonies. These are the works of the law so often spoken of by St. Paul, concerning which the Jews had not only an opinion of the necessity of them to a man's justification and salvation, but likewise of the merit of them; in opposition to both which opinions, St. Paul calls the covenant of the gospel "the law of faith," and "the law of grace."

But there is no where the least intimation given, either by our Saviour or his apostles, that obedience to the precepts of the gospel, (which are in substance the moral law cleared and perfected) is not necessary to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life; but, on the contrary, it is our Saviour's express direction to the young man, who asked, what good things he should do, that he might obtain eternal life? "If thou wilt (says he) enter into life, keep the commandments:" and that he might understand what commandments he meant, he instanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And, indeed, the whole tenor of our Saviour's sermons, and the precepts and writings of the apostles, are full and express to this purpose. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven: whosoever heareth these sayings

of mine, (that is, these precepts which I have delivered) and doth them not, I will liken him to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him. In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith, that is acted and inspired by charity." And that the apostle here means, that charity, or love, which is the "fulfilling of the law," is evident from what he says elsewhere, that "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but the keeping of the commandments of God." In which text it is plain, that the apostle speaks of the terms of our justification, and what is available with God to that purpose. And St. James, to the same purpose, tells us, that "by the works of obedience our faith is made perfect;" and that "faith without works is dead:" and surely a dead faith will neither justify nor save any man. St. John likewise very earnestly cautions us to take heed of any such doctrine, as would take away the necessity of righteousness and obedience: "Little children, (says he) let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous." To all which I shall only add the plain words of my text, that "Christ became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him."

So that no man hath reason to fear, that this doctrine of the necessity of obedience to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life, should be any ways prejudicial to "the law of faith," and "the

law of grace." For so long as these three things are but asserted and secured:

First, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that without it, "it is impossible to please God."

Secondly, That we stand continually in need of the Divine grace and assistance to enable us to perform that obedience which the gospel requires of us, and is pleased to accept in order to eternal life. And,

Thirdly, That the forgiveness of our sins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of God, conferring these blessings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and satisfaction of the obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer; I say, so long as we assert these three things, we give all that the gospel any where ascribes to faith, and to the grace of God revealed in the gospel.

I have been careful to express these things more full and distinctly, that no man may imagine, that, whilst we assert the necessity of obedience and a holy life, we have any design to derogate in the least from the faith and the grace of God; but only to engage and encourage men to holiness and a good life, by convincing them of the absolute and indispensable necessity of it, in order to eternal salvation. For all that I have said, is, in plain English, no more but this—that it is necessary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds fault with his doctrine, finds fault with the gospel itself, and the main end and design of the grace of God therein revealed to mankind, which offers salvation to men upon no other terms than these which I have mentioned; and to preach and

press this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be so, to pursue the great end and design of the Christian religion, so plainly and expressly declared by St. Paul (Tit. ii. 11, 12.) "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." And if the grace of God declared in the gospel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence "wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works:" and then he adds, "these things teach, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority;" that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke severely those who teach or practise contrary to it. And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to Titus, to press upon men the necessity of obedience and good works: (chap. iii. 8.) "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God be careful to maintain good works."

All that now remains, is to make some useful inferences from what hath been said upon this argument, and so to conclude this discourse.

First of all, To convince us that an empty profession of the Christian religion, how specious and glorious soever it be, if it be destitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profession of faith in Christ, no subjection to him, though we be baptized in his name, and list ourselves in the number of his disciples and followers, though we have made a

constant profession of all the articles of the Christian faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone constantly to church, and frequented the service of God, and have joined in public prayers to God with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the blessed sacrament with all imaginable expressions of love and gratitude to our blessed Redeemer; nay, though we had heard our blessed Saviour himself teach in our streets, and had eaten and drunken in his presence; yet, if all this while we have not done the will of God, and obeyed his laws, none of all these things will signify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that salvation, which he hath purchased for mankind.

But we cannot plead so much for ourselves, as those did, of whom our Saviour speaks. None of us shall be able to allege for ourselves, at the great day, that we had prophesied in his name, and in his name had cast out devils, and in his name had done many wonderful works; and yet if we could allege all this, it would do us no good. All that such can say for themselves is, that they have called him Lord, Lord; that is, they have made profession of his religion, and been called by his name; that they have paid an outward honour and respect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him; but they have not done his will, but have hated to be reformed, and have cast his commandments behind their backs; they have only borne the leaves of an outward profession, but have brought forth no fruit unto holiness, and therefore can have no reasonable expectation, that their end should be everlasting life. So that, when these men shall ap-

pear before the great and terrible Judge of the world, they shall have nothing to say but those vain words, Lord, Lord: to which our Saviour will answer in that day, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord: when ye would not do the things which I said?" Notwithstanding all your profession of faith in me, and subjection to me, "ye have been workers of iniquity, therefore depart from me, I know ye not whence ye are."

Secondly, The consideration of what hath been said should stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of what the author of our salvation hath done for us; and there is great reason for thankfulness whether we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchased, or the easy and reasonable terms upon which it may be obtained.

1st, If we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is salvation, eternal salvation, which comprehends in it all the blessings and benefits of the gospel, both the means and the end, our happiness, and the way to it, by saving us from our sins; from the guilt of them, by our justification in the blood of Christ, and from the power and dominion of them, by the sanctifying grace and virtue of the Holy Ghost.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the bestowing of happiness upon us, a great and lasting happiness, great as our wishes, and immortal as our souls; all this is comprehended in eternal salvation.

2dly, If we consider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchased and procured for us; in a way of infinite kindness and condescension, in the lowest humiliation, and the unparalleled sufferings of the Son of God; for "never was there

any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger;" in his taking "upon him the form of a servant," and the person of a sinner, and his becoming "obedient to death, even the death of the cross," which was the punishment of the vilest slaves, and the most heinous malefactors. The Son of God came down from heaven, from the highest pitch of glory and happiness, into this lower world, this vale of tears, and sink of sin and sorrow; and was contented himself to suffer, to save us from eternal ruin; to be the most despicable, and the most miserable man that ever was, that he might raise us to glory and honour, and advance us to a state of the greatest happiness that human nature is capable of.

3dly, If we consider the easy and reasonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unspeakable benefit, and that is, by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws of God, which supposeth repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which best becomes us, and which is most agreeable to the original frame of our nature, and to the dictates of our reason, and which, setting aside the consideration of our reward, is really best for our present benefit and advantage, our comfort and happiness, even in this world; for God, in giving laws to us, hath imposed nothing upon us, but what, in all reason, ought to have been our choice, if he had not imposed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature necessary to make us capable of that happiness which he hath promised to us. And what can be more gracious, than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? than

to promise to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which, upon all accounts, is really best and most for our advantage in this present life?

Thirdly, Here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the Divine assistance promised to us, to enable us to the performance of the most difficult parts of our duty; we have the Holy Spirit of God to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and strengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement we are assured of the Divine acceptance in case of our sincere obedience, notwithstanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the sake of the perfect righteousness, and obedience, and the meritorious sufferings of our blessed Saviour: and though, when we have done all we can do, we are unprofitable servants, and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet God is pleased to accept what we can do, because it is sincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his sake, who fulfilled all righteousness.

And, besides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlasting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any service and obedience that we can perform. And if God be ready to assist and strengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing so graciously to accept and to reward at such a rate the sincerity of our endeavours to please him, notwithstanding all the failings and imperfections of our best service and obedience, what can we possibly desire more for our encouragement to "patient continuance in well-doing," and to be "steadfast, and immoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord?"

Fourthly, and lastly, The consideration of what

hath been said upon this argument, may serve severely to rebuke the groundless presumption of those who rely with so much confidence upon Christ for eternal salvation, without any conscience or care to keep his commandments; as if salvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to dispose of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, "he came to save us from our sins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

So that the salvation, which he hath purchased for us, doth necessarily imply our forsaking of our sins, and returning to God and our duty, and his death and sufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonstration of his perfect hatred of sin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of sin, we defeat the whole design of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and suffered for us; and the redemption which Christ hath wrought for us will not avail us in the least. Salvation is far from the wicked," says David. (Psal. cxix. 155.) If we have been workers of iniquity, the Saviour of the world, when he comes to judge it, will bid us to depart from him.

From all that hath been said, it is evident, that it is the greatest presumption in the world for any man to obtain eternal salvation by any device whatsoever, or in the communion of any church whatsoever, without obedience and a holy life. For though our obedience cannot merit, yet it is necessary to qualify and dispose us for it: though it does not make us strictly worthy, yet it makes us "meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

SERMON CXXIII.

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST, WITH THE COMMISSION AND PROMISE WHICH HE GAVE TO HIS APOSTLES.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.— MATTH. xxviii. 18, 19, 20.

THESE words are the last that our blessed Saviour spake to his apostles, immediately before his ascension into heaven: and there are these three things contained in them:

I. A declaration of his own authority; "all power is given unto me, both in heaven and in earth:"

II. A commission to his disciples, grounded upon that authority; "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

III. A promise to encourage them in this work; "and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

I. Here is our Saviour's declaration of his own authority; "all power is given unto me in heaven and

in earth." Here is an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the Scripture tells us, was conferred upon him, as a reward of his sufferings: (Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10.) "He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;" that is, that all creatures, angels, and men, and devils, should do homage, and acknowledge subjection to him.

II. Here is the commission he gave to his apostles, by virtue of this authority; "go ye therefore and teach all nations." The commission which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he constitutes and appoints the apostles and their successors to manage the affairs of this his spiritual kingdom upon earth; and this seems to be the same commission, which St. John mentions in other words: (John xx. 21.) "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;" that is, as my Father commissioned me before, so now, having received full authority from him, I commission you.

Now, in this commission, which our Saviour gave to his disciples, I shall take notice,

First, Of the general import and design of it.

Secondly, A more particular declaration how they were to manage this design.

First, The general import and design of this commission; "go ye and teach all nations." The word which we translate teach, is μαθητεύσατε, disciple all nations, endeavour to make all the world

Christians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the gospel to the gentiles, as well as the Jews. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this passage in St. Matthew with the other evangelists. St. Mark, chap. xvi. 15. hath it; "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." From which text, I suppose, St. Francis thought himself bound to preach to beasts and birds, and accordingly did it very often, and with wonderful success, as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our Saviour's commission so far, is want of common sense; in which St. Francis (though they tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. Luke (chap. xxiv. 47.) tells us, our Saviour commanded, that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. So that their commission did plainly extend to the gentiles, as well as to the Jews; only they were to begin with the Jews, and to preach the gospel first to them; and, when they had gone over Judea and Samaria, then to pass to other nations, as St. Luke doth most expressly declare: (Acts i. 8.) "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

But see the strange power of prejudice, to blind the eyes even of good men in the plainest matters. The disciples of our Saviour, for all they had entertained a new religion, yet they retained the old pride and prejudice of their nation against the rest of the world; as if none but themselves had any

share in the favour of God, or were to have any part in the salvation of the Messias.

Our Saviour did so far consider this prejudice of theirs, that he never, in his life-time, acquainted them with this matter, so as to make them fully to understand it, because they were not able to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one of those things which our Saviour meant: (John xvi. 12, 13.) "I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth." That is, he should lead them into the knowledge of those truths, of which they were not then capable. And though our Saviour, after his resurrection, seems to have declared this sufficiently to them; yet by their practice, after his ascension, it appears that they understood all this only of the Jews; namely, that they were to preach the gospel first to the Jews that were at Jerusalem, and in Judea, and then to those that were dispersed in other nations; for it is clear from the history of their first preaching, recorded in the Acts, that they preached to none but to the Jews, and the proselytes of the Jewish religion. So strong was their prejudice, that they had not the least suspicion that this blessing of the gospel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinced to the contrary till St. Peter had a special vision and revelation to this purpose, and the Holy Ghost came upon the gentiles in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the Jews that were converted to Christianity. And thus the Spirit of God led them into this truth, and then they understood this command of our Saviour's in a larger sense. And to this St. Peter plainly refers, (Acts x. 42.) where he tells us, how that Christ, after his resur-

rection appeared to them, and " commanded them to preach unto the people." So likewise do Paul and Barnabas, (Acts xiii. 46.) where they speak thus to the Jews : " it was necessary that the word should first be preached to you ; but seeing you put it from you, lo, we turn to the gentiles, for so hath the Lord commanded us." Now he no where commanded this, but in this commission, which he gave them before his ascension.

Secondly, You have here a particular declaration how they were to manage this work of making disciples to the Christian religion.

1. By baptizing them into the Christian faith.

2. By instructing them in the precepts and practices of a Christian life.

1. By baptizing them into the Christian faith, which is here called " baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is a solemn rite appointed by our Saviour for the initiating persons into the Christian religion: but it was a ceremony in use before, both among the Jews and gentiles. The heathens observed it at the initiating persons into their religious mysteries ; and the Jews, when they admitted proselytes to their religion ; at which time the males (as Maimonides tells us) were both circumcised and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumstance of the baptism of grown persons was, that, standing in the water up to the neck, they recited several precepts of the law. And as the Jewish writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of proselytes, if it were desired, upon condition, that when they came to years they should continue in their religion.

Now, though this was a religious ceremony used both by Jews and gentiles, and without any Divine institution, that we know of, our blessed Saviour (who in none of his institutions seems to have favoured unnecessary innovations) was so far from the superstition of declining it upon this account, though it had been in religious use both among Jews and gentiles, that he seems the rather to have chosen it for that very reason. For seeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in itself very significant of that purity which is the great design of all religions, it was the more likely to find the easier acceptance, and to be most suitable to that, which he intended to be the universal religion of the world.

As for the form of baptism, "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," it plainly refers to that short creed, or profession of faith, which was required of those that were to be baptized, answerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of proselytes among the Jews: now the articles of this creed were reduced to these three heads, "of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," and contains what was necessary to be believed concerning each of these. And this probably is that which the apostle calls the doctrine of baptism, (Heb. vi. 2.) viz. a short summary of the Christian faith, the profession whereof was to be made at baptism; of which the most ancient fathers make so frequent mention, calling it "the rule of faith." It was a great while, indeed, before Christians tied themselves strictly to that very form of words, which we now call the Apostles' Creed; but the sense was the same, though every one expressed it in his own words; nay, the same father

reciting it upon several occasions, does not confine himself to the very same expressions : a plain indication that they were not then strictly bound up to any form of words, but retaining the sense and substance of the articles, every one expressed them as he pleased. So that to baptize " in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," is to perform this rite or sacrament by the authority of, and with special relation to, the three persons of the blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the chief objects of the Christian faith, whereof solemn profession was then made. So that upon this form of baptism, appointed by our Saviour, compared with what is elsewhere said in Scripture, concerning the divinity of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is principally founded the doctrine of the blessed Trinity ; I mean in that simplicity in which the Scripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been since confounded and entangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the schools. The Scripture, indeed, no where calls them persons, but speaks of them as we do of several persons ; and therefore that word is not unfitly used to express the difference between them, or at least we do not know a fitter word for that purpose.

By baptizing, then, " in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," is meant, the initiating of men by this solemn rite and ceremony into the Christian religion, upon their profession of the necessary doctrines of it, concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and a solemn stipulation and engagement to live according to those doctrines: which promise of a suitable life and practice was likewise made at the same time, as Justin Martyr and others of the ancient fathers do testify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what use the anabaptists make of this text, so as in effect to lay the whole stress of their cause upon it, as if by virtue of this command of our Saviour's, and the manner wherein it is expressed, all infants, even those of Christian parents, who are themselves already admitted into the new covenant of the gospel, were excluded from baptism; because it is here said by our Saviour, "Go ye and disciple all nations, baptizing them;" from whence they infer, (and very clearly and strongly as they think) that none are to be baptized, but such as are first thoroughly instructed in the Christian religion, and made disciples, which infants are not, but only those who are grown to some maturity of years and understanding: but the opinion and practice of the ancient church in this matter, is a sufficient bar to this inference, at least to the clearness of it. And, indeed, it cannot reasonably be imagined, that the apostles, who had all of them been bred up in the Jewish religion, which constantly, and by virtue of a Divine precept and institution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the right of circumcision, and likewise the infants of proselytes by baptism (as I observed before), I say no man can reasonably imagine, that the apostles could understand our Saviour, as intending, by any consequence from this text, to exclude the children of Christians out of the Christian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the gospel; the children of Christians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant, and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the Jews were of being admitted into the old. Unless we will sup-

pose (which at first sight seems very harsh and unreasonable), that by the terms of the Christian religion, children are in a much worse condition than the children of the Jews were under the law. So that the parity of reason being so plain, nothing less than an express prohibition from our Saviour, and an exception of children from baptism, can be thought sufficient to deprive the children of Christians of any privilege, of which the Jewish were capable. For the plain meaning of this commission to the apostles is, to go and proselyte all nations to the Christian religion; and to admit them solemnly into it by baptism; as the Jews were wont to proselyte men to their religion by circumcision and baptism; by which rites also they took in the children of the proselytes, upon promise that when they came to years they should continue in that religion. And if this was our Saviour's meaning, the apostles had no reason, from the tenor of their commission, to understand that the children of Christian proselytes were any more excluded than the children of proselytes to the Jewish religion, unless our Saviour had expressly excepted them; for it is a favourable case, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obscure consequence from a text, which it is certain was never so understood by the Christian church for fifteen hundred years together. I have done with the first part of their commission, which was, to disciple or proselyte all nations to the Christian religion, and to admit them into the Christian church, by the rite or sacrament of baptism. I proceed to consider the

Second part of their commission, which was, to instruct men in the precepts and duties of a Christ-

ian life, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." You see how their commission bounds and limits them: they were to teach others those precepts which Christ had taught and delivered to them; they had no power by virtue of this commission to make new laws, which would be of universal and perpetual obligation, and consequently necessary to the salvation of all Christians; they were only to be the publishers, but not the authors, of this new religion. And therefore St. Paul, when the Corinthians consulted him about several things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in those cases that should be binding to all Christians. And, for the same reason, Christians do generally at this day think themselves absolved from the obligation of that canon, which was made even in a council of the apostles, as to all those branches of it, the reason whereof is now ceased. But notwithstanding this, the authority which our Saviour conferred upon his apostles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it necessarily imply a power of governing the societies of Christians, under such officers, and by such rules as are most suitable to the nature of such a society, and most fit to promote the great ends of the Christian religion: for without this power of governing, they cannot be supposed to be endowed with sufficient authority to teach; and, therefore, in pursuance of this commission, we find that the apostles did govern the societies of Christians by such rules and constitutions, as were fitted to the present circumstances of Christianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occasions, so they constituted others that were of perpetual

use in the church, for the instructing and governing of Christians, and that in such a subordination to one another, as would be most effectual to the attaining of the end of government; which subordination of governors, hath not only been used in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil societies that ever were in the world. And this may suffice to have spoken of the second part of their commission.

The third and last thing in the text, is the promise which our Saviour here makes for the encouragement of the apostles in this work; "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" that is, though I be going from you in person, yet I will still be present with you by my power and Spirit. And surely this must needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their assistance, who had "all power in heaven and earth committed to him," as he tells them at the 18th verse.

I shall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promise. That it is primarily made to the apostles, no man can doubt, that considers that it was spoken to them immediately by our Saviour; and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this—that our Saviour would send down the Holy Ghost upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them and assist them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the apostles, will be very plain, by considering how this promise is expressed by the other evangelists; Mark xvi. 17. instead of this promise,

you have these words immediately after our Saviour had given them commission to go and preach the gospel; "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned." And then it follows: "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils, and shall speak with new tongues." And, Luke xxiv. 49. instead of, "Lo, I am with you," it is said, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you;" that is, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost; for it follows in the next words, "but tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high." This St. Luke himself interprets of the promise of the Holy Ghost; (Acts i. 4, 5.) "He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which (saith he) ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." And, (ver. 8.) "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." So that no man that compares these texts together, can doubt, but that this was the primary meaning of this promise, as it was made to the apostles.

But then it is as plain, likewise, that this promise is to be extended farther than to the persons of the apostles, even to all those that should afterwards succeed them in this work of preaching the gospel, and baptizing, because our Saviour adds, that he would be with them to the end of the world: which words, because they reach far beyond the apostles'

times (as I shall shew by and by), must necessarily be extended to such persons in after ages, as should carry on the same work.

There are two famous controversies about the sense of these words, in which this promise is expressed.

The first is, concerning the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, "alway, to the end of the world."

The other, concerning the substance of the promise itself, what is meant by our Saviour's being with them. In the first, we have to deal with the enthusiasts; in the latter, with the papists. I shall examine the pretences of both these, as briefly and plainly as I can.

First, Concerning the circumstance of time expressed in these words, "alway, to the end of the world." The enthusiast would persuade us, that the meaning of these phrases is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promise is to be limited to the apostles' persons, and that the sense of it is, that Christ would be with the apostles πᾶσας τὰς ἡμέρας, all their days, so long as they should live, and that would be, ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, to the end of that age; thus they translate it, and with no worse design than to take away the necessity of a gospel ministry.

But this pretence will vanish, if we can make good these two things:

1. That the letter of this promise extends farther than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reason of it extends to all that should succeed them in their ministry, to the end of the world.

1. The letter of this promise extends farther than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age. I will easily grant that the phrase πᾶσας τὰς ἡμέρας, signifies only *continually;* I will be with you continually; but then the other phrase ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, until the end of the world, is several times in Scripture undeniably used for the end and dissolution of all things, and cannot, with any probability, be shewn to be ever used otherwise. In this sense it is unquestionably used three times, Matt. xiii. "The harvest is the end of the world," (ver. 39.) "So shall it be at the end of the world," (ver. 40.) and ver. 49. it is said, that "at the end of the world, the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the just, and cast them into the furnace;" which must either be understood of the end of the world, and of the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text in the whole Bible to that purpose; and it is very probable, that this phrase is used in the same sense, (Matt. xxiv. 3.) where the disciples ask our Saviour, "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" As will appear to any one that considers our Saviour's answer to this question; the latter part whereof cannot, without too much violence, be accommodated to any thing but the final dissolution of the world. Now, if this phrase be every where else in Scripture used in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken otherwise in the text, only to serve the purpose of an unreasonable opinion.

I know there are phrases very near akin to this, which are used in a quite different sense; namely, for the expiration of the Jewish state: and that we may know how to distinguish them, it is observable, that when the Scripture speaks of the end of the world,

it is called συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος, the end of the age, in the singular number; but when it speaks of the times before the gospel, it always expresseth them in the plural: the reason of which is, that famous tradition among the Jews, of the house of Elias, which distributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the Messias; and this last age they looked on with great difference from the rest, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be, as it were, the beginning of a new world: and therefore the Jews in their writings constantly call it the *sæculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: and therefore the apostle in this Epistle to the Hebrews, calls the state of the gospel by that name, as best known to them: (Heb. ii. 5.) "But unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak;" that is, the law was given by the disposition of angels, but the dispensation of the gospel, which is called the world to come, was managed and administered by the Son of God. So likewise, (Heb. vi. 5.) those miraculous powers which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, are called δυνάμεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, "the powers of the world to come;" that is, of the gospel age.

So that this last age of the gospel, is that which the Scripture, by way of eminency, calls the age; those that went before are constantly called αἰῶνες, the ages, in the plural number. So we find, (Eph. iii. 9.) the gospel is called "the dispensation of the mystery that was hid in God," ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων, from ages; and you have the same phrase, Col. i. 26. Upon the same account, the expiration of the Jewish state is in Scripture called "the last times," and "the last days:" (Heb. i. 2.) "But in these last days, God

hath spoken to us by his Son." (1 Cor. x. 11.) "These things are written for our admonition, upon whom τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων, the ends of the ages are come." In the same sense the apostle, (Heb. ix. 26.) speaking of Christ, says, that "he appeared, ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων, at the end of the ages," to take away sin; that is, at the conclusion of the ages which had gone before, in the last age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of this text, by the constant use of this phrase in Scripture, the letter of this promise will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reason of this promise does extend to all those that should succeed the apostles in their ministry, to the end of the world; I will suppose now (to give the adversaries their utmost scope), that which we have no reason to grant, that the letter of this promise reacheth only to the apostles and their age, and that our Saviour's meaning was no more but this—that he would send down the Holy Ghost upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them till this work was done. Now, supposing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, so long as it is certain, that the reason of it does extend to the successors of the apostles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reason of this promise does give us sufficient assurance, that God will assist the teachers and governors of his church in all ages, in the same extraordinary manner as he did the apostles, because there is not the like reason and necessity for it; but that we have sufficient assurance from the reason of this promise, that God will not be wanting to us, in

such fitting and necessary assistance, as the state of religion, and the welfare of it in every age, shall require: for can we imagine that God will use such extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and to take no care of it afterwards? that he who had begun so good a work, so great and glorious a design, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was necessary to the support of it?

This is reasonable in itself; but we are not also without good ground for thus extending the general reason of particular promises beyond the letter of them. The apostle hath gone before us in this, for (Heb. xiii. 5, 6.) he there extends two particular promises of the Old Testament to all Christians: "Let your conversation (says he) be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." And again, "The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me." These promises were made to particular persons; the first of them to Joshua, and the other to David; but yet the apostle applies them to all Christians, and to good men in all ages, because the general ground and reason of them extended so far. He who gave Joshua and David this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And thus I have done with the first controversy about the sense of these words, which concerns the circumstances of time mentioned in this promise, "alway, to the end of the world;" and have plainly shewn, that both the letter and the reason of this promise does extend further than the persons of the apostles, and the continuance of that age, even to all that should succeed them in their ministry to the end of the world. I come now to consider,

Secondly, The substance of the promise itself; namely, What is meant by our Saviour's "being with them." And here our adversaries of the church of Rome would fain persuade us, that this promise is made to the church of Rome, and that the meaning of it is, that the church should always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of Rome in this promise, nor any where else in Scripture upon the like occasion, whereby we might be directed to understand this promise to be made to that church; so, to any unprejudiced person, the plain and obvious sense of this promise can be no other than this, that our Saviour, having commissioned the apostles to go and preach the Christian religion in the world, he promises to assist them in this work, and those that should succeed them in it "to the end of the world." But how any man can construe this promise so as to make it signify the perpetual infallibility of the Roman church, I cannot, for my life, devise; and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabric of their infallibility.

Here is a general promise of assistance to the pastors and governors of the church, in all ages, to the end of the world; but that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility (as it was to the apostles) can neither be concluded from the letter of this promise, nor from the reason of it; much less can it be from hence concluded, that the assistance here promised, if it were to the degree of infallibility, is to be limited and confined to the supreme pastor and governor of the Roman church.

That the assistance here promised shall always be to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be

concluded from the letter of this promise. Indeed, there is no pretence or colour for it; he must have a very peculiar sagacity, that can find out in these words, "I am with you always," a promise of infallible assistance. Is not the promise which God made to Joshua, and which the apostle to the Hebrews applies to all Christians, and to all good men in all ages, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," the very same in sense with this, "I will be with you always?" And yet, surely, no man did ever imagine, that by virtue of this promise, every Christian, and every good man, is infallible.

But neither can it be inferred from the reason of this promise, that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility. It was so, indeed, to the apostles; the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were bestowed upon them for the more speedy and effectual planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, were a Divine testimony and confirmation to the doctrine which they delivered; and having this Divine testimony given to them, we are certain that they were secured from error in the delivery of that doctrine. So that the apostles had no other infallibility, but what depended upon, and was evidenced by, the miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed; and therefore, without the like gifts, none can with reason pretend to the like infallibility: for infallibility signifies an extraordinary assistance of God's Spirit, whereby those who are thus assisted are secured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaseth, pretend to; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give such evidence of it, as is fit to satisfy reasonable men that he hath it. Now, the only sufficient evidence of such an extraordinary Divine assistance, is the

power of miracles. This, indeed, is the great external testimony of a teacher come from God, "if he do such works as none can do, except God be with him;" and this evidence the prophets of old, and our Saviour, and his apostles, always gave of their infallibility. And if the pope and general councils can give the testimony of such miracles for their infallibility, as Moses, and our Saviour, and his apostles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a testimony as this would give the world a thousand times more satisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the subtle arguments of Bellarmine, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may dispute about it to the end of the world; and every man that hath but the same confidence, may pretend to it with as much reason as they do.

But to proceed in my argument: here is a plain reason why this extraordinary assistance should be granted to the apostles at first; and another reason, as plain, why it should not be continued afterwards. It was reasonable, and in some degree necessary, that the apostles should be thus assisted at the first publication of the gospel; namely, to give satisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witnesses of the doctrine and miracles of Christ. But since this doctrine and these miracles are recorded to posterity by those very persons that were thus assisted, here is as plain a reason, why, after the gospel was planted and established in the world, this infallibility should cease. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith; namely, the Divine revelation consigned in writing, and transmitted down to us by testimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixed and standing infallibility in the church? But having handled

this argument more at large elsewhere, I shall insist no further upon it here.

I have now done with the three things I propounded to discourse upon from this text. You have heard what authority our Saviour had given him; what commission he gave to his disciples; and what assistance he hath promised to the pastors and governors of his church to the end of the world: namely, such an assistance as is suitable to the exigencies of the church, in the several ages and states of Christianity; which assistance was at first very extraordinary and miraculous. God was pleased to give witness to the first teachers and publishers of the gospel, "with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost;" and this, at first, was in a very great degree necessary, it not being otherwise imaginable, how Christianity could have borne up against all that force and violent opposition which was raised against it: but this extraordinary assistance was but a temporary and transient dispensation. God did, as it were, pass by "in the strong and mighty wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire: but he was in the still voice;" that is, he designed to settle and continue that dispensation, in that more calm and secret way of assistance, which offers less violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the constant and permanent dispensation. So that we have no reason to think, that God hath now forsaken his church, though he be not with it in so sensible and extraordinary a manner.

But then, if any particular church desire and expect this blessed presence and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, we must remember, there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how absolute soever this promise may be, in respect of the

church universal; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as sad experience, in many instances, hath shewn. God hath long since left the church of Jerusalem, where the gospel was first published; he hath left the church of Antioch, where the believers of the gospel were first called Christians; he hath left the famous churches of Asia, to that degree of desolation, that the ruins and places of some of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may also be the fate of any particular church, not excepting Rome herself, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God: towards them that fell, severity; but towards us goodness, if we continue in his goodness, otherwise we also shall be cut off."

This, as I observed before, is spoken particularly to the Roman church; the apostle supposeth that the church of Rome herself may be guilty of apostacy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and, indeed, seems to foretel it; which, how it consists with their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look to it.

And let all particular churches look to themselves, that they do not forfeit this promise of Divine assistance. For Christ hath not so tied himself to any particular church, but that, if they forsake him, he may leave them, and "remove his candlestick from them." There have been many sad instances of this, since the first planting of Christianity; and we have no small reason to apprehend that it may come to be our own case; for certainly we have many of those marks of ruin among us, which did foretel the destruction of the Jewish church and nation: horrible profaneness and contempt

of religion, division and animosities to the highest degree, and an universal dissoluteness and corruption of manners. And why should we, who do the same things, think ourselves exempted from the same fate? What can we expect, but that God should deal with us as he did with them; "take away the kingdom of God from us, and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it?"

The condition of this great promise here in the text, to the pastors and governors of the Christian church, is the faithful execution of their commission; if they do sincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of Christianity, Christ hath promised to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the ministers of the gospel in general, that they should be diligent and faithful in their respective stations, "teaching men to observe all things, whatsoever Christ hath commanded." And if we would make this our great work, to instruct our respective charges in the necessary doctrines of faith, and the indispensable duties of a good life, we should have far less trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we must be serious in our instructions and exemplary in our lives.—Serious in our instructions: this certainly the apostle requires in the highest degree, when he chargeth ministers, "so to speak, as the oracles of God;" to which nothing can be more contrary than to trifle with the word of God, and to speak of the weightiest matters in the world, the great and everlasting concernments of the souls of men, in so slight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated stage.

Can any thing be more unsuitable than to hear a minister of God, from this solemn place, to break jests upon sin, and to quibble upon the vices of the age? This is to shoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only to make men smile at the mention of their faults; this is so nauseous a folly, and of so pernicious consequence to religion, that hardly any thing too severe can be said of it.

And then, if we would have our instructions effectual, we must be exemplary in our lives. Aristotle tells, that the manners of the speaker have κυριοτάτην πίστιν, the most sovereign power of persuasion. And, therefore, Cato puts it into the definition of an orator, that he is *vir bonus, dicendi peritus*, "a good man, and an eloquent speaker." This is true as to all kinds of persuasion; the good opinion which men have of the speaker gives great weight to his words, and does strangely dispose the minds of men to entertain his counsels. But the reputation of goodness is more especially necessary and useful to those whose proper work it is to persuade men to be good; and therefore the apostle, when he had charged Titus to put men in mind of their duty, he immediately adds, "in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works." None so fit to teach others their duty, and none so likely to gain men to it, as those who practise it themselves, because hereby we convince men that we are in earnest, when they see that we persuade them to nothing but what we choose to do ourselves. This is the way to stop the mouths of men, and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. Peter tells us: (1 Pet. ii. 15.) "For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men."

SERMON CXXIV.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE CONSIDERED.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.—LUKE xiii. 24.

THERE are two great mistakes about the nature of religion, equally false, and equally pernicious to the souls of men: and the devil, whose great design it is to keep men off from religion by any means, makes use of both these mistakes, to serve his own purpose and design upon the several tempers of men. Those who are melancholy and serious, he disheartens and discourageth from attempting it, by the extreme trouble and difficulty of it, representing it in so horrid and frightful a shape, incumbered with such difficulties, and attended with such troubles and sufferings, as are insuperable, and intolerable to human nature; whereby he persuades men, that they had better never attempt it, since they may despair to go through with it.

On the other hand, those who are sanguine, and full of hopes, he possesses with a quite contrary apprehension; that the business of religion is so short and easy a work, that it may be done at any time; and, if need be, at the last moment of our lives, though it is not so well to put it upon the last hazard; and by this means a great part of mankind are lulled in security, and adjourn the business of

religion from time to time; and because it is so easy, and so much in their power, they satisfy themselves with an indeterminate resolution to set about that business some time or other before they die, and so to repent, and make their peace with God, once for all.

These pretences contradict one another, and therefore, cannot be both true; but they may both be false, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither so slight and easy a work as some would have it, nor so extremely difficult and intolerable as others would represent it. To confute the false apprehensions which some have of the easiness of it, our Saviour tells us, there must be some striving; and to satisfy us that the difficulties of religion are not so great and insuperable as some would make them, our Saviour tells us, that those who strive shall succeed and enter in; but those who only seek, that is, do not vigorously set about the business of religion, but only make some faint attempts to get to heaven, shall not be able to enter in. "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able."

The occasion of which words of our blessed Saviour, was a question that was put to him by one of his disciples, concerning the number of those that should be saved: (ver. 23.) One said unto him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" To which curious question, our Saviour (according to his manner when such kind of questions were put to him) does not give a direct answer, because it was neither necessary nor useful for his hearers to be resolved in; it did not concern them to know what number of persons should be saved, but what course

they should take that they might be of that number; and therefore, instead of satisfying their curiosities, he puts them upon their duty; admonishing them, instead of concerning themselves what should become of others, to take care of themselves. "And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." He does not say, that but few shall be saved (as some have presumptuously ventured to determine), but only few in comparison of those many that "shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

In these words we may consider these two things:

First, The duty enjoined; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

Secondly, The reason or argument to enforce it: "For many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

First, The duty enjoined; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." Which words being metaphorical, I shall strip them of the metaphor, that so we may see the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, these three things are plainly intended:

1st, The course of a holy and Christian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, is here represented to us by a way, which every man that would come to heaven, must walk in. For so St. Matthew (who expresseth this more fully) makes mention of a way, as well as a gate, by which we must enter into it; "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life." And this, though it be not expressed by St. Luke, is necessarily understood; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate;" that is, into the way that leads to life.

2dly, The first difficulties of a holy and religious course of life, are here represented to us by a strait gate. For the gate at which we enter, and the way in which we walk, can signify nothing else, but the beginning and progress of a holy and religious course.

3dly, Our diligence and constancy in this course, are represented by *striving*, a word which hath a great force and emphasis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθε, a metaphor taken from the earnest contention which was used in the Olympic games, by those who strove for mastery in running or wrestling, or any of the other exercises which were there used.

Secondly, Here is a reason added to enforce the exhortation or duty; "for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able:" that is, there are a great many that will do something in Christianity, and make some faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet shall fall short of it, for want of such a firm resolution and earnestness of endeavour, as is necessary to the attaining of it.

Having thus explained the words, I shall take occasion from the first part of them, namely, the duty or exhortation, to handle these three points, very useful for us to consider, and to be well instructed in:

1st, The difficulties of a holy and Christian course.

2dly, The firm resolution and earnest endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of these difficulties.

3dly, That these difficulties are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just discouragement to our endeavours; if we will strive, we may master them.

First, The difficulties of a holy and Christian

course And these are either from ourselves, or from something without us.

1. From ourselves; from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and customs, contracted by vicious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good; besides that, being habituated to sin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a custom, and to turn the course of our life another way. Now, because this is the difficulty of our first entrance into religion, it is represented by a strait gate, which is hard to get through.

2. There are, likewise, other difficulties from without; as, namely, the opposition and persecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the first beginnings of Christianity. And this our Saviour represents by the ruggedness and roughness of the way, as St. Matthew expresseth it: (chap. vii. 14.) "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads to life, Καὶ τεθλιμμένη ἡ ὁδὸς, *confragosa est via*, (so Grotius renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that these are the two great difficulties in a Christian course; indisposition from within, and opposition from without.

1. Indisposition from within. And this makes religion so much the more difficult, because it checks us at our very first entrance upon our Christian course, and makes us unwilling to set out. The corruption of our nature, and those vicious habits, which by a long custom of sin we have contracted, do strongly incline us to the contrary way, so that a man must offer great force and violence to himself, that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardest

things in the world to break off a vicious habit, and to get loose from the tyranny of custom. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of it as next to a natural impossibility: (chap. xiii. 23.) " Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." This requires great striving indeed. Nothing shews the spirit and resolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit; for in this case a man strives against the very bent and inclination of his soul; and it is easier to set a man against all the world, than to make him fight with himself: and yet this every man must do, who, from any wicked course of life, betakes himself seriously to religion; he must, as it were, lay violent hands upon himself, and fight with the man he was before; and this in Scripture is emphatically expressed to us, by " crucifying the old man, with the affections and lusts thereof." A Christian, when he first enters upon a holy and good course of life, is represented as two persons and parties at civil war one with another, the old and the new man; so that whoever will be a Christian must put off himself, and become another man; and it is no easy matter for a man to quit himself.

2. In our Christian course, we must likewise expect to meet with great opposition from without. Blessed be God, Christianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the first profession of it; it was then, indeed, a very steep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without sweat and blood; then the dangers and hazards of the profession were such, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral resolution, and the natural strength of

flesh and blood; the persecution that attended it was so hot, and the torments which threatened it so terrible, that the sensual and inconsiderate part of mankind would rather venture hell at a distance, than run themselves upon so present and evident a danger.

But since these ages of persecution, this difficulty hath been in a great measure removed. Not but the true religion hath still its enemies in the world; but they are not let loose, as they were in those times: it is still persecuted and exposed to the malice and reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unreasonable men. In the calmest times there is hardly any man can be a strict and sincere Christian, without being liable to hatred and contempt, without denying himself many of those worldly advantages, which those who make no conscience of the strict laws of Christianity may make to themselves; so that, at all times, it requires a good degree of constancy and resolution to persevere in a holy course, and to bear up against the opposition of the world, and to withstand its temptations, to be "harmless and blameless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation;" not to be infected with the eminent and frequent examples of vice, and carried down with the stream of a corrupt and degenerate age. So that though our difficulties be not always the same, and equal to those which the primitive Christians encountered, yet there is enough to exercise our best resolution and care, though the main body of the enemies of Christianity be broken, and "the sons of Anak be destroyed out of the land; yet some of the old inhabitants are still left, to be thorns in our sides, and pricks in our eyes," that true religion may always have something to exercise its

force and vigour upon. I have done with the first point, and the difficulties of a Christian course. I proceed to the

Second, The earnest endeavour that is to be used on our part, for the conquering of these difficulties. And to the business of religion, if we will set upon it in good earnest, these three things are required :

1st, A mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and Christian course.

2dly, Great diligence and industry to carry us on in it.

3dly, An invincible constancy to carry us through it, and make us persevere in it to the end.

1st, A mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course. For want of this most men miscarry and stumble at the very threshold, and never get through the strait gate, never master the difficulties of the first entrance. Many are well disposed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way (especially in their young and tender years), but they want firmness of resolution to conquer the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious and virtuous life ; like the young man that came to our Saviour, well inclined to do some good thing, that " he might inherit eternal life ;" but when it came to the point, he gave back, he was divided betwixt Christ and the world, and had not resolution enough to part with all for him.

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better course of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous course they are in ; but they cannot bring themselves to a fixed purpose and resolution : and yet without this nothing is to be done, " the double-minded man is unstable in all his

ways." There must be no indifferency and irresoluteness in our minds, if we will be Christians: we must not stop at the gate, but resolve to press in. We see that men take up peremptory resolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the world, and they can be true and steadfast to these resolutions; and why should not men resolve to be wise and happy, and stand to these resolutions, and make them good? God is more ready to assist and strengthen these kind of resolutions than any other; and I am sure no man hath so much reason to resolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other resolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happiness, that this will.

2dly, The business of religion, as it requires a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course, so likewise a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the strait gate, we must account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the course of a Christian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be resisted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climbed without labour; and the Scripture frequently calls upon us, "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with great care and industry; "to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure;" to follow holiness, διώκειν, to pursue it with great earnestness. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3dly, The business of religion requires an invin-

cible constancy to carry us through it, and to make us persevere in it to the end. Resolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great constancy and firmness of mind to hold out in a good course. A good resolution may be taken up upon a present heat and may cool again; but nothing but a constant and steady temper of mind will make a man persevere; and yet, without this, no man shall ever reach heaven. "He that continueth to the end shall be saved; but if any man draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in him." God puts this case by the prophet, and determines it, (Ezekiel xviii. 24.) "When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, shall he live? all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them he shall die;" nay, so far will his righteousness be from availing him, if he do not persevere in it, that it will render his condition much worse, to have gone so far towards heaven, and at last to turn his back upon it. So St. Peter tells us: (2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.) "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." I proceed to the

Third point; namely, That the difficulties of a holy and a Christian life are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just ground of discouragement to our endeavours. All that I have said concerning the difficulties of religion was with no design to

damp, but rather to quicken our industry; for, upon the whole matter, when all things are duly considered, it will appear, that "Christ's yoke is easy, and his burthen light; that the commandments of God are not grievous;" no, not this commandment of "striving to enter in at the strait gate;" which I shall endeavour to make manifest by taking these four things into consideration.

1. The assistance which the gospel offers to us. God hath there promised to "give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him;" and by the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, we may be able to conquer all those difficulties. Indeed, if we were left to ourselves, to the impotency and weakness of our own nature, we should never be able to cope with these difficulties; every temptation would be too hard for us; every little opposition would discourage us; but "God is with us, and there is nothing too hard for him." If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own resolution, they would easily be borne down; but they are from God, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatsoever is "born of God, overcometh the world." (John i. 12, 13.) "As many as received him, to them gave he power (ἐξουσίαν, the privilege) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

God considers the impotency of human nature, in this depraved and degenerate state into which we are sunk, and therefore he hath left us to ourselves; but when he commands us to work out our own salvation, he tells us for our encouragement, that "he himself works in us both to will and to do:" he does not bid us to be strong in our own

strength, for he knows we have no strength of our own, but to be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" and what may not even a weak creature do, that is so powerfully assisted? If we will but make use of this strength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that God expects from us is, that we should comply with the motions of his Spirit, and be as sincere in the use of our own endeavours, as he is in the offers of his grace and assistance.

2. Let us consider, that the greatest difficulties are at first; it is but making one manful onset, and sustaining the first brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow less, and our strength will every day increase and grow more. The gate is strait; but when we have once got through it, "our feet will be set in an open place." After some struggling to get through, we shall every day find ourselves at more ease and liberty. It will be very hard at first, to master our vicious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the course of our lives, and to act contrary to what we have been long accustomed: but this trouble lasts but for a little while; these pangs of the new-birth, though they be sharp, yet they are not usually of long continuance.

It does, indeed, require great resolution and firmness of mind, to encounter the first difficulties of religion; but if we can but stand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleasure of victory will tempt us on. It is troublesome to conflict with great difficulties, and men are loath to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greatest pleasures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loath to go to war; but after a little success, they are as loath to give over; that which was a terror to them at first, turns into a pleasure.

3. Consider that custom will make any course of life tolerable, and most things easy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life, is difficult at first; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become easy; nay, by degrees, much more pleasant than ever the contrary practice was. We see the daily experience of this, in the most difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at first, but when he is once seasoned and inured to labour, idleness becomes more tedious and troublesome to him than the hardest work. Custom will make any thing easy, though it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than sin; it is not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a second nature superinduced upon us by custom; whereas the practice of holiness and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive state; and sin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reason, and the design of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and interest: but by returning to God and our duty, we return to our primitive state; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary custom is taken off, and the bias clapped on the other side, we shall "run the ways of God's commandments with more delight" and satisfaction, than ever we found in the ways of sin.

For sin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneasy, yet it is made more tolerable by custom: but religion restores men to their natural state, and then we are at ease and rest. Religion is at first "a yoke and burthen:" but unless we take this upon us, we shall never find rest to our souls.

4thly, and lastly, Consider the reward that religion propounds, and this must needs sweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occasioned by it. This "strait gate" through which we must enter, and this "craggy way" which we are to climb up, leads to life, and he is a lazy man, indeed, that will not strive and struggle for life. All that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miserable life which is so short and uncertain, and "born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards;" a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble, if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But it is not this life which our Saviour means; that, indeed, were not worth all this striving for: it is eternal life; a state of perfect and endless happiness; of "joys unspeakable and full of glory." And who would not strive to enter in at that gate which leads to so much felicity? Can a man possibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever?

So often as I consider what incredible industry men use for the things of this life, and to get a small portion of this world, I am ready to conclude, that either men do not believe the rewards of another world, or that they do not understand them; else they could not think much to be at the same pains for heaven, that they can cheerfully bestow for the obtaining of these corruptible things. Can we be so unconscionable, as to think God unreasonable, when he offers heaven and everlasting happiness to us upon as easy terms, as any thing in the world is ordinarily to be had? And are not we very foolish and unwise, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms so infinitely below the true worth and value of it?

I have now done with the three things which I propounded to speak to from the first part of these words, which are so many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text; to "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and to give all diligence, by the course of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven; and we may assure ourselves, that nothing less than this will bring us thither. So our Saviour tells us, in the latter part of the text, that "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." I now proceed to the

Second part of the text; The reason or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced; "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." Every seeking to enter in will not gain our admission into heaven; therefore there must be striving: for men may do many things in religion, and make several faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at last fall short of it, for want of that earnest contention and endeavour, which is necessary to the attaining of it. We must make religion our business, and set about it with all our might, and persevere and hold out in it, if ever we hope to be admitted to heaven; "for many shall seek to enter," that shall be shut out.

Now what this seeking is, which is here opposed to striving "to enter in at the strait gate," our Saviour declares after the text: (ver. 25.) "When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets: but he shall say, I tell you, I

know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity." St. Matthew mentions some other pretences which they should make; upon which they should lay claim to heaven: (Matt. vii. 21—23.) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." After all their seeking to enter in, and notwithstanding all these pretences, they shall be shut out, and be for ever banished from the presence of God. This shall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, because of the disappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. Luke tells us: (chap. xiii. 28, 29.) "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." To which St. Matthew adds, (chap. viii. 12.) "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And then our Saviour concludes: (Luke xiii. 30.) "Behold, there are last that shall be first, and first which shall be last." From all which it appears, with what confidence many men, upon these false pretences (which our Saviour calls "seeking to enter in,") shall lay claim to heaven, and how strangely they shall be disappointed of their ex-

pectation and hope; when they shall find themselves cast out of heaven, who they thought had outdone all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and the children and heirs of the kingdom; and shall see others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of salvation, come from all quarters, and find free admission into heaven; and shall find themselves so grossly and widely mistaken, that those very persons whom they thought to be last, and of all others farthest from salvation, shall be first; and they themselves, whom they took for the children of the kingdom, and such as should be admitted into heaven in the first place, shall be rejected and cast out.

So that by "seeking to enter," we may understand all those things which men may do in religion upon which they shall pretend to lay claim to heaven; nay, and confidently hope to obtain it; and yet shall be shamefully disappointed, and fall short of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges soever men pretend, what ways and means soever men endeavour to appease the Deity, and to recommend themselves to the Divine favour and acceptance, all this is but "seeking to enter in," and is not that striving which our Saviour requires. If men "do not do the will of God, but are workers of iniquity," it will all signify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happiness.

Our Saviour here instanceth in men's profession of his religion, calling him "Lord, Lord;" in their personal familiarity and conversation with him, by eating and drinking in his presence and company; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and salvation, "Thou hast taught in our streets;"

in their having prophesied, and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power; "Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" These were great and glorious things which they boasted of; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men "do not the will of God;" notwithstanding all this, he will say unto them, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity."

And by a plain parity of reason, whatever else men do in religion, what attempts soever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences soever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall short of it, if they "do not do the will of God, but are workers of iniquity." My business, therefore, at this time shall be, to discover the several false claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet shall never enter into it. And to this purpose I shall instance in several particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themselves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal salvation.

1st, Some trust to the external profession of the true religion.

2dly, Others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3dly, There are others that find themselves much affected with the word of God, and the doctrines contained in it.

4thly, Others are very strict and devout in the external worship of God.

5thly, Others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salva-

tion is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6thly, Others think their great zeal for God and his true religion, will certainly save them.

7thly, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8thly, Others rely much upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, and become the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life; and being once truly so, they can never fall from that state, so as finally to miscarry.

Lastly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at the last.

I shall briefly go over these particulars, which are the several ways whereby men seek to enter into heaven, and hope to get thither at last; and shall shew the insufficiency of them; and that there is something beyond all this necessary to be done for the attainment of everlasting salvation.

1st, Some trust to the mere external profession of the true religion, and think it enough to call Christ, Lord, Lord; to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the Christian church. What the apostle says of the profession of the Jewish religion, and the outward badge of it, circumcision, may be applied to the profession of Christianity made in baptism: (Rom. ii. 17. 25. 28, 29.) "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God. Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision; for he is not a Jew that is

one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." The case is the same of those who make only an outward profession of Christianity. "Baptism verily profiteth, if we perform the condition of that covenant which we entered into by baptism;" but if we do not, our baptism is no baptism: for he is not a Christian which is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian which is one inwardly, and baptism is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in water only. So St. Peter tells us, (1 Pet. iii. 21.) that baptism is not only the washing of the body with water, and "the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God."

The promise of eternal life and happiness is not made to the external profession of religion, without the sincere and real practice of it. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, (says our Saviour) and do not the things which I say?" The Scripture hath no where said, he that is baptized shall be saved; but "he that believeth and is baptized, he that repenteth and is baptized, shall be saved." This deserves to be seriously considered by a great many Christians, who have nothing to shew for their Christianity, but their names; whose best title to heaven is their baptism, an engagement entered into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by any act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2dly, There are others who have attained to a

good degree of knowledge in religion, and they hope that will save them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never so clear and great, do not descend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a false and sandy foundation. So our Saviour tells us: (Matt. vii. 26.) "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." And, (John xiii. 17.) "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more grossly impose upon themselves, than in this matter; as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of God, who yet take no care to practise it in their lives? Like those in the prophet Ezekiel, xxxiii. 31. of whom God complains, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear my words, but they will not do them." None do so foolishly, and yet so deservedly, miss of happiness, as those who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3dly, There are others who find themselves much affected with the word of God, and the preaching of it; and this they take for a very good sign, that it hath its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of God makes considerable impressions upon men for the present, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for their sins, and afraid of the judgments of God, and the terrible vengeance of another world; and upon

this they take up some resolutions of a better course, which after a little while vanish and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of Israel; they delighted to hear the prophet speak to them in the name of God, (Ezek. xxxiii. 32.) "And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not." Mark vi. 20. it is said that Herod had a great reverence for John the Baptist, "that he observed him, and heard him gladly;" but yet, for all that, he continued the same cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the sower, (Matt. xiii. 20.) there are one sort of hearers mentioned, who, "when they heard the word, received it with joy; but having no root in themselves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, presently they are offended." There are many men who have sudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the present; but it must be a rooted and fixed principle, that will endure and hold out against great difficulties and opposition. Acts xxiv. 25. it is said, that when St. Paul "reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled:" and nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily startled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and borne down, and their consciences touched to the quick: a lively representation of the evil of sin, and the infinite danger of a sinful course, may stir up the passions of grief and fear, and dart such stings into the consciences of men, as may make them extremely restless and unquiet, and work some good thoughts and inclina-

tions in them towards a better course; and yet like metals, when the heat is over, they may be the harder for having been melted down.

4thly, Others shew great strictness and devotion in the worship of God, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet some of the worst of men have been very eminent for this. The pharisees were the most exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion; and yet for all this, our Saviour plainly tells them, that they were farther from the kingdom of God, than those who seemed to be farthest, than publicans and harlots: and that because they were so very bad, under so great a pretence of devotion, therefore they should "receive the greater damnation."

Not but that external devotion is a necessary expression of religion, and highly acceptable to God, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really such in their hearts and lives as their external devotion represents them to be: but when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloak for sin and wickedness, when there is nothing within to answer all the show that we see without, nothing is more odious and abominable to God. These are mere engines and poppets in religion; all the motions we see without proceed from an artificial contrivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape, because the beast makes some pretence to human shape, so nothing is more fulsome than this hypocritical devotion, because it looks like religion, but is the farthest from it of any thing in the world.

5thly, Others confide very much in their being mem-

bers of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others of getting to heaven. Thus the Jews confined salvation to themselves, and looked upon all the rest of the world as excluded from it. And not only so, but they believed that by one means or other every Israelite should be saved. So that they were the Jewish catholic church, out of which there was no hope of salvation for any.

The same pretence is made by some Christians at this day, who engross salvation to themselves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have so ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miscarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot possibly err in matters of faith; they have not only "eat and drunk in Christ's presence," but have eat and drunk his very corporal presence, the natural substance of his flesh and blood; they have not only our blessed Saviour, but innumerable other intercessors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in case they be defective, they may have the merits of others assigned and made over to them out of the infinite stock and treasure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them; and by a due course of confession and absolution, may quit scores with God for all their sins from time to time. Or, if they have neglected all this, they may, after the most flagitious course of life, upon attrition (that is, upon some trouble for sin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with confession and absolution, get to heaven at last; provided the priest mean honestly, and

do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the saving benefit and effect of this sacrament.

But is it possible men can be deluded at this rate! as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? that any church hath the privilege to save impenitent sinners? And they are really impenitent, who do not exercise such a repentance as the gospel plainly requires; and if men die in this state, whatever church they are of, the great Judge of the world hath told us, that he will not know them, but will bid them to depart from him, because they have been workers of iniquity.

6thly, Others think that their zeal for God, and his true religion, will certainly save them. But zeal, if it be not according to knowledge, if it be mistaken in its object, or be irregular and excessive in the degree, is so far from being a virtue, that it may be a great sin and fault; and though it be for the truth, yet if it be destitute of charity, and separated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So St. Paul tells us, that "though a man shall give his body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it is nothing."

7thly, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this sure will do the business. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a considerable awe and influence upon men's hearts and lives, and yet they may fall short of happiness. Men may in many considerable instances perform their duty to God and man; and yet the retaining of one lust, the practice of any one known sin, may hinder them from "entering in at the strait gate." Herod did not only hear John gladly, but did many things in obedience to his

doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The pharisee thanked God (and it may be truly) that he was not like other men, an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer; and yet the penitent publican was justified before him. The young man who came to our Saviour to know what he should do to enter into life, and of whom our Saviour testifies, that he was not far from the kingdom of God, and that he wanted but one thing; yet for want of that he miscarried. And St. James assures us, that "if a man keep the whole law, and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all." If we be workers of iniquity in any one kind, Christ will disown us, and bid us depart from him.

8thly, Others rely upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent of their wicked lives, and did change their course, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good course. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapsed into their former evil course: and if so, the prophet hath told us their doom, that "if the righteous man forsake his righteousness, his righteousness shall not be remembered; but in the sin that he hath sinned, in that shall he die." So that a righteous man may turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and die in it. For the prophet doth not here (as some vainly pretend) put a case, which is impossible in fact should happen, unless they will say, that the other case which he puts together with it, of "the wicked man's turning away from his wickedness, and doing that which is lawful and right," is likewise impossible, which God forbid. And that men may fall from a state of grace, is no matter of

discouragement to good men; but a good caution against security, and an argument to greater care and watchfulness; according to that of the apostle, "Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall;" which admonition were surely to little purpose, if it were impossible for them that stand to fall.

Lastly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at last. This, indeed, is only to seek, and not to strive to enter in; and these perhaps are they, whom our Saviour represents as "standing without, and knocking at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;" or, as St. Matthew expresses it, "Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord," which is most probably meant of the day of judgment, when their case is brought to the last extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entering into a state of endless happiness or misery. And no wonder, if the sinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happiness in the next: but the door is then shut to most sinners, and it is a miracle of God's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exercise (which at the best must needs be very confused and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity, which men can then use, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that, after all the evil actions of a long life, God should be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forced and constrained repentance for all our wilful and deliberate crimes, and that he should forgive us all our sins upon a little importunity, when we can sin no longer, and will repent no sooner.

Let us then, by all that hath been said, be effectually persuaded to mind the business of religion in

good earnest, and, with all our might, especially the practice of it, in the exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the sins of our past life, and resolve upon a better course for the future; and let us not delay, and put off this necessary work to the most unfit and improper time of old age, and sickness, and death: but let us set about it presently, and enter upon a good course, and make all the speed and progress in it we can.

And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven, if we do not "do the will of our Father which is in heaven;" if we do not give up ourselves to a constant and universal obedience to his laws. To "strive to enter in at the strait gate:" and though we strive to enter in a thousand other ways, we shall not be able; and after all our confidence and conceit of ourselves, and our own righteousness, and security of our salvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a strange damp and disappointment to us, to see the sincere Christians, who have done the will of God, and lived in obedience to his laws, to come from all quarters, and churches in the world, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God;" when we, who thought ourselves "the children of the kingdom, shall be cast out," because we have been workers of iniquity. I will conclude all with those plain words of the apostle, (Rom. ii. 7—9.) "To them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel."

SERMON CXXV.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.—LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

I INTEND, by God's assistance, to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole gospel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumstances whereof a greater decorum is observed.

It is a great question among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and Lazarus be a parable, or a history, or a mixture of both. That it is not a history, the resemblance between it and others of our Saviour's parables, will easily convince any man that is not contentious; besides that, in some ancient copies, it is ushered in with this preface, "And he spake a parable to his disciples: A certain rich man," &c.

But yet, as some of the ancients have not improbably conjectured, it seems to be such a kind of parable, as had something of a real foundation; as, namely, there was such a poor man as Lazarus is here described, and of that name among the Jews: for in a mere parable it is altogether unusual to name persons, nor is this done in any other of our Saviour's parables.

But whether this be so or not is not worth the

disputing, because it alters not the case as to our Saviour's purpose, and the instructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I shall explain it as I go along, and draw two sorts of instructions or observations from it.

The first sort of observations shall be from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable: and these I will not warrant to be all intended by our Saviour; but only to be true in themselves, and useful, and to have a probable rise from some circumstances of the parable, and therefore I shall speak but very briefly to them.

The second sort of observations shall be such as are grounded upon the main scope and intent of the parable; and these I shall insist more largely upon. I begin,

First, With those observations and instructions which I shall gather up from the circumstances which serve for the decorum of the parable; and I shall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

(Ver. 19.) "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." Some think that our Saviour, in this description, reflected upon Herod, because he describes this rich man to be "clothed in purple." But this conjecture is without reason; for, besides that it was not our Saviour's custom in his preaching to give secret girds to the magistrate; it is certain that it was long after our Saviour's time that purple was appropriated to kings: it was then, and a great while after, the wear of rich and powerful men, and of the favourites and great men of the court, who are frequently, in ancient histories, called the *purpurati*, those that wore purple.

That which I observe from hence is, that the rich man is not here censured for enjoying what he had, for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great table. This of itself, if it be according to a man's estate and quality, and without intemperance, is so far from being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But here was his fault, that he made all to serve his own sensuality and luxury, without any consideration of the wants and necessities of others: whereas one of the great uses of the plentiful tables of rich men is from the superfluity of them to feed the poor and the hungry.

(Ver. 20.) "And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus;" as if our Saviour had said, for instance, poor Lazarus whom ye all knew. And here I cannot but take notice of the decorum which our Saviour uses. He would not name any rich man, because that was invidious and apt to provoke. He endeavours to make all men sensible of their duty; but he would provoke none of them by any peevish reflection; for nothing is more improper than to provoke those whom we intend to persuade. While a man's reason is calm and undisturbed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if we once stir up men's passions, it is like muddying of the waters, they can discern nothing clearly afterwards. But to proceed in the parable.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the rich man's gate, full of sores, and was desirous to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Here are three great aggravations of the rich man's uncharitableness:

1st, That here was an object presented itself to him.

2dly, Such an object as would move any one's pity, a man reduced to extreme misery and necessity.

3dly, A little relief would have contented him.

1st, Here was an object presented itself to him, Lazarus laid at the rich man's gate; so that so often as he went out of his own house and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably disposed will inquire out objects for their charity, and not always stay till they thrust themselves upon them; but he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is presented, is so far from relenting towards him, that he stops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him. He is an uncharitable man who, being rich, and hearing of the miseries of others, does not take them into consideration: but what we see with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel disposition in the rich man, that having so many occasions of seeing Lazarus, he should never be moved to commiserate him.

2dly, Here was such an object presented to him as would move any one's pity, a man reduced to extreme misery and necessity. Here was no common object of charity; a man, not only in extreme want, but in great pain and anguish, and so helpless, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troublesome to him: and yet this did not move him.

3dly, A very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindness to him; that which the rich man might have spared without the least prejudice to himself. He would have been glad to have been "fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table;" and yet the

parable intimates, that the rich man was so hard-hearted as not to afford him these.

(Ver. 22.) "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Here was a great and sudden change! He who, when he was alive, was neglected by men, and contumeliously exposed like a dead carcass to the dogs, when he dies is attended on by the angels, and by them safely conveyed into a state of unspeakable happiness. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. "The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom."

It is very observable that our Saviour in this parable represents men as passing immediately out of this life into a state of happiness or torment. And as in no other place of Scripture, so neither in this, where it had been so proper, does our Saviour give the least intimation of the state of purgatory, which the church of Rome hath devised, and makes so much profit and advantage of; which because it is so visible and apparent, we may, without uncharitableness, suppose to be the reason why they keep such a stir about it.

"And was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." It was an ancient tradition among the Jews, that the angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their souls into paradise, which is here called "Abraham's bosom." And this was a proper place for Lazarus, who had been neglected by the rich man; to be conveyed into "Abraham's bosom," who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve strangers.

And paradise is fitly called "Abraham's bosom," because the Jews had so great a veneration for

Abraham, and that deservedly for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the first place among the blessed. Hence is the expression (Matt. viii. 11.) of "sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." Now this expression of being in "Abraham's bosom," is an allusion to the custom of feasts among the Jews, where the most esteemed and beloved guest sat next him that was chief at the feast, and leaned on his bosom. Hence, St. John is called the disciple whom Jesus loved, because, when he sat at meat, he leaned on his bosom, (John xiii. 23.) Hence, likewise, is the expression of our Saviour's being "in the bosom of his Father," to signify his dearness to him, (John i. 18.) "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father he hath declared him."

I proceed. "The rich man also died, and was buried." "The rich man also died:" this is very elegant and emphatical, insinuating to us what the Scripture so often takes notice of, that riches, for all men's confidence in them, will not deliver from death. This rich man, indeed, was out of danger of being starved and famished, as poor Lazarus was: but death had other ways to come at him. It is probable enough that he might be surfeited by "faring sumptuously every day." "The rich man also died."

"And was buried." And here again we may observe the strict decorum which our Saviour uses in this parable. It is not said of Lazarus that he was buried, but only that "he died;" it is probable that he was flung out of the way into some pit or other; but of the rich man it is said he was buried. And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great estate after he is dead, to have a pomp-

ous and solemn funeral, which yet signifies nothing to him after death, because he is insensible of it.

(Ver. 23.) "And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." As corporal acts are attributed to God in Scripture, so likewise to separated souls.

"In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments;" intimating to us, that this sensual and voluptuous man had stupidly passed away his life, without any serious thoughts and consideration; but now at last he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to consider. "In hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments."

O the stupidity of sinners! who run on blindly in their course, and never open their eyes till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to consider, till consideration will do them no good; till it serve to no other purpose but to enrage their consciences, and to multiply the stings of them!

Thus it was with this rich man; "he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Our Saviour represents him as seeing that which would then most probably come to his mind. Feeling his own misery, he began to consider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had so cruelly neglected. And, indeed, one great part of the torment of hell consists in those reflections which men shall make upon the happiness which they have wilfully lost and neglected, and the sins whereby they have plunged themselves into that miserable state.

(Ver. 24.) "And he cried, and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my

tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." See how the scene is changed; now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar who had sued to him in vain!

"Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue." Here is another very decent circumstance; the rich man is represented as not having the face to beg any great relief from Lazarus, towards whom he had been so hard-hearted. To "dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue," had been a very great favour from Lazarus, to whom the rich man had denied even the "crumbs which fell from his table."

"For I am tormented in this flame." The Scripture loves to make use of sensible representations, to set forth to us the happiness and misery of the next life; partly by way of condescension to our understandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilst we are in the body, and immersed in sense, we are most apt to be moved by such descriptions of things as are sensible; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are usually in Scripture described to us, by one of the quickest and sharpest pains that human nature is ordinarily acquainted withal; namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the most active thing in nature, and therefore capable of causing the sharpest pains.

But we cannot from these and like expressions of Scripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: all that we can infer from these descriptions is this—that the sufferings of wicked men in the other world, shall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater, than can possibly be described to us, by any thing that we are now acquainted withal: for who knows the

power of God's anger, and the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? For, as the glory of heaven, and the joys of God's presence are now inconceivable; so likewise are the torments of hell, and the miseries of the damned. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered in the heart of man," those dreadful things "which God prepares for them that hate him." Who can imagine the utmost significancy of those phrases which the Scripture uses to set forth this to us, of God's being "a consuming fire," of being "tormented in flames," of God's wrath and jealousy smoking against sinners, and all the curses that are written in his book, falling upon them? Who can conceive the horror of those expressions, of "the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched;" of God's "pouring out the vials of his wrath," of being "delivered over to the tormentor," of being "thrust into utter darkness," of being "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone?" These forms of speech seem to be borrowed from those things which among men are most dreadful and affrighting: and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities, and not so much intended to express to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more sensible and affecting manner the sense of what the Scripture says in general, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

(Ver. 25.) "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." "Abraham said, Son, remember." It is very observable, how our Saviour chooses to represent to us the discourse between Abraham and the rich man; though there

was the greatest difference between them imaginable; the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly. Abraham is brought in giving the common terms of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling him son; "Son, remember." It was, indeed, a very severe thing which he said to him; he put him in mind of his former prosperity, and of his fault in his unmerciful usage of Lazarus; "Remember, son, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus," &c. But yet whilst he speaks such sharp things to him, he bates bad language. A man may say very severe things, where a just occasion requires it, but he must use no reviling; *rem ipsam dic, mitte male loqui*, "say the thing, but use no bad language." And this, as one says, is the true art of chiding, the proper style wherein we must use to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is misbecoming, even though we despair of doing good; but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miss of it this way, for, as the apostle says excellently, "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Some think that Abraham gives the rich man the title of son ironically, and by way of jeer; but without all reason. For surely there is not so much bad nature in heaven, as to scoff at those who are in misery. Besides that, we find our Saviour observing this decorum of good language in other of his parables; as, particularly, in that of the king who invited guests to the marriage of his son. (Matt. xxii. 11.) When the king saw there the man that came without his wedding garment, though he passed a very severe sentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility; "Friend, how camest thou hither?"

This should teach us Christians, how we ought to demean ourselves towards those who are at the greatest distance from us, and how we ought to behave ourselves towards one another in the greatest differences of religion. None sure can be at greater distance than Abraham in paradise, and the rich man in hell; and yet our Saviour would not represent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that Abraham should have reviled this poor wretch, and disdained to have spoken to him: but this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worst of men.

How does this condemn our rudeness and impatience with one another, in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to use towards one another: and yet one of the most famous disputes that we find mentioned in Scripture, and that between the most opposite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another fashion; I mean that recorded by St. Jude, between Michael the archangel and the devil: (ver. 9.) "Yet Michael the archangel, when, contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring a railing accusation;" he durst not allow himself this, no, not in the heat of dispute, when persons are most apt to fly out into passion, because it was indecent, and would have been displeasing to God; this I believe is the true reason why it is said, "he durst not bring a railing accusation." And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our consideration, I am sure it hath a good moral, the devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better skilled at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of dispute.

Which consideration may be a good argument to us against reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjust, because they deserve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwise, because we shall get nothing by it. I could almost envy the character which was given of one of the Romans; *Nescivit quid esset male dicere;* "He knew not what it was to give bad language."

I proceed. "Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things." "Thy good things," those which thou didst value and esteem so highly, and didst place thy chief happiness in, as if there had been no other good to be sought after. "Thy good things," and indeed so he used them, as if he had been the sole lord and proprietor of them, and they had not been committed to him, as a steward, to be dispensed for his master's use, for the clothing of the naked, and the feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of those in distress.

(Ver. 27, 28.) "Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Here the rich man, though in hell, is represented as retaining some tenderness for his relations, as solicitous lest they should be involved in the same misery with himself. The last piece of that which commonly remains in men is natural affection, which is not so much a virtue, as a natural principle, and is common to many brute beasts. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for lost to all manner of goodness. To be without natural affection, is the worst character that can be given of a man. Our Saviour represents this rich man in hell, as not so totally degenerate as to be quite destitute of this.

I think some attribute this motion of the rich man concerning his brethren to another cause ; as if he had desired it, not out of kindness to them, but out of regard to himself; as being afraid, that if his brethren, who probably were corrupted by his example, had perished by that means, it would have been an aggravation of his torments. But this conjecture is too subtile, and without any good ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not increased by any consequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the same whether men follow it or not, because he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into sin ; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one observation more, and that is from the mention of his brethren as his nearest relations, which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableness, because he is represented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not consider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavoured to explain this parable, and have made such observations from the circumstances of it, as may be useful for our instruction: but as I premised at first, I will not warrant all these observations to be certainly intended by our Saviour; I know very well that every circumstance of a parable is not to be pressed too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main scope of it, and many circumstances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make handsomer way for that which is most material, and principally intended : but so long as the observations are true and useful, and have a fair colour and occasion from the circumstances, it

is well enough ; to be sure there is no harm done. I proceed to the second sort of observations ; namely, such as are drawn from the main scope and intent of the parable, which I promised to speak more largely to ; and they are six, which I shall handle in order.

First, I observe that uncharitableness and unmercifulness to the poor, is a great and damning sin. We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his superfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of justice, but of charity ; not for having got a great estate by fraud or oppression, but that, in the midst of his abundance, he had no consideration and pity for those that were in want.

I shall endeavour to make out this observation by the parts of it.

1st, That unmercifulness and uncharitableness to the poor is a great sin.

2dly, Such a sin, as, alone and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. I shall speak to these severally.

1st, That unmercifulness and uncharitableness to the poor is a very great sin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity ; it is an argument of a cruel and savage disposition not to pity those that are in want and misery. And he doth not truly pity the miseries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of others, is a virtue so proper to our nature, that it is therefore called humanity, as if it were essential to human nature, and as if, without this, we did not deserve the

name of men. To see men like ourselves, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," labouring under want and necessity, and yet not to be moved to commiserate him, this is a sign that we have put off our own nature, otherwise we should pity the sufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like ourselves, groaning under want, and pressed with necessity, and do not relent towards him, and are not ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do, in some sense, what the apostle says "no man ever did, (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) hate his own flesh."

This the Scripture speaks of as a most barbarous sort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, (1 John iii. 15.) "Whoso hateth his brother, is a murderer;" and not to relieve our brother in want, is to hate him; for this is the instance which the apostle gives at the 17th verse, "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in want, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him;" whoso doth not consider the poor, is a manslayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay, were he sufficiently sensible of the condition of human nature, he is cruel to himself.

Seest thou a poor man in great misery and want, there is nothing hath befallen him but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it, therefore, thine own case; (for so the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokest him to make it so speedily, by thy unmerciful disposition toward the poor,) I say, make it thine own case; if thou were in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, consult

thine own bowels, and tell me how thou wouldst wish him to be affected toward thee. Wouldst thou be willing that he should slight and repulse thee, and shut up his bowels of compassion from thee? If not, then do not thou deal so with him; consider that it may be thine own case; therefore, do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmerciful, lest they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the first aggravation of this sin, the inhumanity of it. But,

2. Besides the inhumanity of this sin, it is likewise a great impiety toward God. Unmercifulness to the poor hath this fourfold impiety in it; it is a contempt of God; an usurpation upon his right; a slighting of his providence; and a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere.

1. It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of him; so Solomon tells us, (Prov. xiv. 31.) "He that oppresseth the poor," (not only he that dealeth unjustly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the opposition, "but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor." Here oppression of the poor is opposed to want of charity towards him;) "He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker." How is that? He despiseth God, who made him after his own image and likeness; for the poor man bears the image of God as well as the rich, so that thou canst not oppress or neglect him, without some reflection upon God, whose image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an usurper upon God's right. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," and "he hath given it to the children of

men ;" not absolutely to dispose of as they please, but in trust, and with certain reservations, so as to be accountable to him for the disposal of it. In respect of other men, we are, indeed, true proprietors of our estates: but in respect of God, we are but stewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours; but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our family, in the rank wherein God hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if God hath been liberal to us in the blessings of this life, it is on purpose to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be so to others that stand in need of our charity; and we are false to our trust, if we keep those things to ourselves, which we receive from God for this very end, that we might distribute them to others, according to the proportion of our ability and their necessity. This is to hide our Lord's talent in a napkin, and that which thou storest up in this case is unjustly detained by thee; for God intended it should have been for bread for the hungry, and for clothes for the naked, for the relief and support of those who were ready to perish.

3. The uncharitable man is impious, in slighting of God's providence. He does not consider that riches and poverty are of the Lord, that he can soon change our condition, and that it is an easy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not sufficiently reverence the Providence which rules the world, if, when God hath blessed us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for those that are in need. God can soon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the poor man whom thou dost neglect. He can " cast down the mighty

from their seat, and exalt the humble and meek; fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away."

God's providence could easily have disposed of things otherwise, to have secured every man from want: but he hath on purpose ordered this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that some men might have an advantage to insult over and despise others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exercise of several virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exercise their dependance upon God, and their patience and submission to his will; and that the rich might shew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifulness to the poor is a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere. St. James tells us, that "pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and the widow." (James i. 27.) That "the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy and good fruits," (chap. iii. 17.) St. John represents this uncharitable disposition as utterly inconsistent with the true love of God: (1 John iii. 17.) "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In vain does such a man pretend to love God; nay, (chap. iv. ver. 20.) he tells us, that it is impossible such a man should love God. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" This deserves to be seriously considered by those who make a great show of devotion, and are at great

pains in prayer, and fasting, and reading, and hearing the word of God, and in all other frugal exercises of religion, which stand them in no money; lest all their labour be lost for the want of this one necessary and essential part; lest, with the young man in the gospel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by Christ for lack of this one thing. I have done with the first part of the observation, that unmercifulness is a very great sin. I proceed to the

2d, That it is such a sin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man's condemnation upon this, it was the guilt of this sin that tormented him when he was in hell. The Scripture is full of severe threatenings against this sin. (Prov. xxi. 13.) "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard." God will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text, (James ii. 13.) "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy."

Our Saviour hath two parables to represent to us the danger of this sin; this, here in the text, and that in Luke xii. concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was still laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our Saviour makes this observation, which is the moral of the parable: (ver. 21.) "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;" so shall he be, such an issue of his folly may every one expect, who layeth up treasure for himself, but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? The Scripture tells us, by works of mercy and charity; this our Saviour calls "laying up for ourselves treasures

in heaven," (Matt. vi. 20.) And, (Luke xii. 33.) he calls giving of alms, " providing for ourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not."

There is no particular grace and virtue to which the promise of eternal life is so frequently made in Scripture, as to this of mercy and charity to the poor: (Matt. v. 7.) " Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy." Which promise, as it does not exclude a reward in this world, so it seems principally to respect the mercy of God at the great day: (Luke xiv. 12—14.) " When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich, for they will recompense thee again ; but invite the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind, for they cannot recompense thee ; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." (Luke xvi. 9.) " Make, therefore, to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." (1 Tim. vi. 17—19.) " Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation," as the word θεμέλιος is sometimes used, " a good treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life."

But the most considerable text of all other to this purpose is, in Matt. xxv. where our Saviour gives us a description of the judgment of the great day: and if that be a true and proper representation of the process of that day, then the grand inquiry will be, what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly sentence shall be passed upon us.

The proper result from all this discourse is, to

persuade men to this necessary duty. Our eternal happiness does not so much depend upon the exercise of any one single grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and, as it were, the parents of all the rest: but of all single virtues, the Scripture lays the greatest weight upon this of charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts of the gospel, and the promises and threatenings of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averse men generally are to this duty, which make them so full of excuses and objections against it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the case of all, and they whose case it is, may do well to consider, that it will not be amiss to leave a blessing as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us they intend to do something when they die. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why should men choose to spoil a good work, and take away the grace and acceptableness of it, by the manner of doing? It shews a great backwardness to the work, when we defer it as long as we can. He that will not do good till he be forced by the last necessity, *diu noluit*, was long unwilling. It is one of the worst compliments we can put upon God, to give a thing to him when we can keep it no longer.

3. Others say, they may come to want themselves, and it is prudence to provide against that. To this I answer,

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the sooner to want for his charity. David hath an express observation to the contrary; (Psal. xxxvii. 25.) "I

have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." And though he uses a general word, yet that, by the righteous here, he intended the merciful man, is evident from the next words, " he is ever merciful and lendeth."

And besides David's observation, we have express promises of God to secure us against this fear; (Psal. xl. 1, 2.) " Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth." (Prov. xxviii. 27.) " He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack."

(2.) Thou mayest come to want though thou give nothing; thou mayest lose that which thou hast spared in this kind as well as the rest; thou mayest lose all, and then thou art no better secured against want than if thou hadst been charitable. Besides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou wilt want the comfort of having done this duty, and mayest justly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the causes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for ourselves, we must trust the providence of God; and a man can in no case so safely commit himself to God as in well-doing. If the providence of God (as we all believe) be peculiarly concerned to bless one man more than another, I dare say the charitable man will not have the least portion.

(4.) There is a worse objection than all these, made by some grave men, who would be glad, under pretence of piety, to slip themselves out of this duty; and that is this, that it savours of popery to press good works with so much earnestness upon

men, as if we could merit heaven by them; so that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, lest hereby they should entertain the doctrine of merit.

But, if the truth were known, I doubt covetousness lies at the bottom of this objection: however, it is fit it should be answered. And,

(1.) I say, that no man that is not prejudiced, either by his education or interest, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of God, to whom all that we can possibly do is antecedently due; much less that we can merit so great a reward as that of eternal happiness.

(2.) Though we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the necessity of them to eternal life. And that they are necessary to eternal life, is as good an argument to persuade a wise man to do them, as if they were meritorious; unless a man be so vain-glorious, as to think heaven not worth the having, unless he purchase it himself at a valuable consideration.

And now, let me earnestly entreat you, as you love God and your own souls, not to neglect this duty; lest you bring yourselves to the same miserable state with this rich man, to whom the least charity that could be asked was denied. Our Saviour hath purposely left this parable on record, to be a testimony and a witness to us; lest we, being guilty of the same sin, "should come into the same place of torment."

And if any ask me, according to what proportion of his estate he ought to be charitable? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, because I cannot (and it may be no one else can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his estate. There

are some duties that are strictly determined, as those of justice; but God hath left our charity to be a free-will offering. In the proportion of this duty, every one must determine himself by prudence and the love of God. God hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeness of our hearts towards him; only to encourage us to be abundant in this grace, he hath promised, that according to the proportion of our charity, shall be the degree of our happiness: (2 Cor. ix. 6.) "He that soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully." But let us be sure to do something in this kind; any part of our estate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counsel of the son of Sirach, (Eccl. iv.) "My son, defraud not the poor, and make not the needy eyes to wait long; make not a hungry soul sorrowful, neither provoke a man in his distress; add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed, and defer not to give to him that is in need. Reject not the supplication of the afflicted, neither turn away thy face from a poor man; turn not thy eye away from the needy, and give him none occasion to curse thee. For if he curse thee in the bitterness of his soul, his prayer shall be heard of him that made him. Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor, and give him a friendly answer with meekness. Be as a father to the fatherless, and instead of a husband to their mother; so shalt thou be as the Son of the Most High, and he shall love thee more than thy mother doth."

SERMON CXXVI.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.—LUKE xvi. 19, 20.

I PROCEED to our second observation, that a man may be poor and miserable in this world, and yet dear to God. This beggar, Lazarus, though he was so much slighted and despised in his life-time by this great rich man, yet it appeared, when he came to die, that he was not neglected by God, for he gave his angels charge concerning him, to convey him to happiness; (ver. 22.) "The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom."

But this truth is not only represented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our blessed Saviour. Never was any man so dear to God as he was, for he was his "only-begotten Son, his beloved Son, in whom he was well-pleased:" and yet, how poor and mean was his condition in this world; insomuch, that the Jews were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in so much meanness for the true Messias. He was born of mean parents, and persecuted as soon as he was born; he was destitute of worldly accommodations: "The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head. He was de-

spised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

God could have sent his Son into the world with majesty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him: but the wisdom of God chose rather that he should appear in a poor and humble, in a suffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who measure the love of God by these outward things, and think that God hates all those whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not possible to give a greater and clearer demonstration of this truth, that goodness and suffering may meet together in the same person, than in the Son of God, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief."

Afflictions in this world are so far from being a sign of God's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care; "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Those he designs for great things hereafter he trains up by great hardships in this world, and by many tribulations prepares them for a kingdom. This course God took more especially in the first planting of Christianity; the poor chiefly were those that received the gospel. "Not many mighty, nor many noble; but the base things of the world, and the things that were despised, did God choose." "Hearken, my beloved brethren, (saith St. James, chap. ii. 5.) hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?"

Now this consideration should persuade to patience under the greatest sufferings and afflictions in

this world. God may be our Father, and chasten us severely; nay, this very thing is rather an argument that he is so. God may love us, though the world hate us. It is but exercising a little patience, and these storms will blow over, and we shall be removed into a calmer region, where "all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; and death and sorrow shall be no more." This was the portion of the Son of God here; but it is a faithful saying, that "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." Therefore, those who suffer in this world ought not to be moved, "as though some strange thing happened unto them; but they should rather rejoice, inasmuch as they are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, they also may be glad with exceeding joy," (1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.) I proceed, to a

Third observation, which is the different estate of good and bad men after this life; "Lazarus died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man died," and went to hell. This the justice of Divine Providence seems to require; so that if there had been no revelation of God to this purpose, it is a thing very credible to natural reason, whether we consider God or ourselves. If we consider God, our reason tells us, that he is the holy and righteous governor of the world, and consequently, that he loves goodness, and hates sin; and therefore is concerned to countenance the one, and discountenance the other, in such a solemn and public manner, as may vindicate his holiness and justice to the world. Now the dispensations of his providence are promiscuous in this world; and therefore

it seems very reasonable, that there should be a general assize, a fair and open trial; when "God will render to every man according to his works."

And if we consider ourselves, this will appear very credible; for this has been the constant opinion, not only of the common people, but of the wisest persons, who had only the light of nature to guide them. Nay, if we do but search our own consciences, we shall find an inward and secret acknowledgment of this, in that inward peace and satisfaction we find in any good action, and in that shame, and fear, and horror, that haunts a man after the commission of any, though never so secret a sin.

And as reason and Scripture together do assure us of a future judgment; so likewise, that men, when they pass out of this world, shall meet with the proper consequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And though the happiness or misery of men be not so complete as it shall be after the public judgment, yet it is unspeakably great. Lazarus is represented as very happy immediately after his passing out of this world; he is said to be carried into Abraham's bosom: by which the Jews express the happiness of the future state. And the rich man is represented as in great anguish and torment. But what the happiness of good men, and the misery of wicked men, shall be in the other state, we can but now imperfectly and unskilfully describe. Each of these I have in another discourse spoken something to. I proceed, to a

Fourth observation, the vast difference between men's conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man prospered here, and was afterwards tor-

mented: Lazarus was poor and miserable in this world, and happy in the other; (ver. 25.) "Remember, that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." And it is very agreeable to the wisdom of God, to make such a difference between men's conditions in this world and the other; and that for these two reasons:

1st, For the trying of men's virtue.

2dly, In order to the recompensing of it.

1. For the trial of men's virtue. For this end principally God ordains the sufferings of good men, and permits the best of his servants many times to be involved in the greatest calamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent those sins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual prosperity are apt to draw even the best of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they shall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their sincerity towards God, and to exercise their patience and submission to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happiness of heaven more welcome to them, when they shall come to it.

2. In order to the recompensing of men: that they who will take up with the pleasures and enjoyments of this present world, and take no care for their future state; that they who will gratify their senses, and neglect their immortal souls, may inherit the proper consequences of their wretched choice. And, on the other hand, they who love God above all things, and had rather endure the greatest evils, than do the least; that they who look beyond the present scene of things, and believe the reality

and eternity of the other state, and live accordingly, may not be disappointed in their hopes, and serve God and suffer for him for nothing. From this consideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

1. That no man should measure his felicity or unhappiness by his lot in this world. If thou receivest thy good things, art rich and honourable, and hast as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wish; art splendidly attired, and farest sumptuously every day; art in no trouble like other men, neither art plagued like other folk; do not upon this bless thyself as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miserable, destitute of all the conveniencies and accommodations of this life; do not repine at thy lot, and murmur at God for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miserable for what befals him in this life; "no man knows love or hatred by these things;" this is but a short and inconsiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are passing through this world: the state of eternity is that wherein the happiness or misery of man shall be determined. He is the happy man who is so in that life which shall never have an end; and he is miserable that shall be so for ever.

2. We should not set too great a value upon the blessings of this life. We may receive our good things here, and be tormented hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconsiderable part of our torment, none of the least aggravations of our misery, that we did receive our good things. Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more sensibly when he is in misery, than the remembrance of his

former prosperity; had he never been happy, his misery would be the less.

Therefore we should be so far from applauding ourselves in the prosperity of this world, that we should rather be afraid of receiving our good things here; lest God should put us off with these things, and this should be all our portion, and lest our misery in the next world be the greater for our having been happy.

The felicities of this world are transient, and though our happiness were never so complete, yet it is going off, and passing away; and when it is gone and past, if misery succeed it, it had better never have been. "Remember, thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things;" these things are only for our life-time, and how short is that! Did men seriously consider this, they would not set such a price upon any of the transient enjoyments of this life, as for the sake of them to neglect the great concernments of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the present glittering of worldly glory and prosperity: but if we would look upon these things as they will be shortly gone from us, how little would they signify! the rich man here in the parable did, no doubt, think himself a much happier man than poor Lazarus that lay at his door; and yet, after a little while, how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! when he was in torments, then, no doubt, he wished that he had suffered all the misery and want in this world which Lazarus did, provided he might have been comforted as he was, and "carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." We should value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoyed it, but when he was taken from it; and we

should esteem it, and use it while we may, as he wished he had done when it was too late.

3. We should not be excessively troubled if we meet with hardship and affliction here in this world; because those whom God designs for the greatest happiness hereafter, may receive evil things here. Thus our blessed Saviour, "the Captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings:" this was the method which God used towards his own Son, first "he suffered, and then entered into glory." He suffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he supported himself under all his sufferings, by the consideration of the glory that would follow; "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame."

The same consideration should arm us with patience and constancy under the greatest evils of this life. The evils that we lie under are passing and going off; but the happiness is to come. And if the happiness of the next world were no greater, nor of longer continuance, than the miseries of this world; or if they did equally answer one another; yet a wise man would choose to have misery first, and his happiness last. For if his happiness were first, all the pleasure and comfort of it would be eaten out by dismal apprehensions of what was to follow: but his sufferings, if they were first, would be sweetened by the consideration of his future happiness, and the bitterness of his sufferings would give a quicker relish to his happiness when it should come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the sufferings of this life, hath not only this comfort, that his happiness is to come, but likewise that it shall be infinitely greater than his sufferings; that these are but short, but

that they shall never have an end. And this was that which fortified the first Christians against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do against them. They thought themselves well paid, if, through many tribulations they might, at last, " enter into the kingdom of God ;" because they believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompense all their labours and sufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward, far beyond all their sufferings ; they were firmly persuaded that they should be vast gainers at the last. So the apostle tells us of himself, (Rom. viii. 18.) " I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." And to the same purpose, (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.) " Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen ; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." If we would consider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happiness and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and splendour of this; if we would look as much at " the things which are not seen," as " the things which are seen," we should easily perceive, that he who suffers in this world does not renounce his happiness, only puts it out to interest, upon terms of the greatest advantage.

4. We should do all things with a regard to our future and eternal state. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, because that is to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have a great and serious regard to that state that never shall have an end. Therefore, whenever we

are doing any thing, we should consider what influence such an action will have upon the happiness or misery of the next life. We should measure every action and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world, will contribute nothing to our future happiness; all these things which we so much doat upon, and pursue with so much eagerness, will not commend any man to God; they will signify nothing when we come to appear before our Judge. Death will strip us of these things, and in the other world, the soul of the poorest man that ever lived, shall be upon equal terms with the richest. Nothing but holiness and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while, and we shall all certainly be of this mind, that the best thing men can do in this world is to provide for the other. I proceed, to a

Fifth observation, that the state of men in the next world is fixed and unchangeable; which I ground upon ver. 26. "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they that would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." By which words our Saviour seems, not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourse with one another; but likewise that they are lodged in an immutable state. Those that are happy, are like to continue so; and those that are miserable, are immutably fixed in that state.

1. As to those that are in happiness, there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have so narrowly escaped the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are possessed of so great a happiness by the free grace and mercy of God, to

do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happiness; or so much as entertain a thought of offending that God, to whom they cannot but be sensible how infinitely they are obliged? In this imperfect state few men have so little goodness as to sin without temptation, but in that state where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwise, it is not imaginable that they should fall from that state.

2. As to the state of the damned, that that likewise is immutable, the Scripture does seem plainly enough to assert, when it calls it "an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord," and uses such expressions to set forth the continuance of their misery, as signify the longest and most interminable duration, expressions of as great an extent, as those which are used to signify the eternal happiness of the blessed; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in those languages wherein the Scriptures are written.

Besides that, wicked men in the other world are in Scripture represented, as in the same condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not because repentance is impossible in its own nature to those that are in extreme misery; but because there is no place left for it. Being under an irreversible doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impossible. For if a man did utterly despair of pardon, and were assured upon good ground that God would never shew mercy to him, in this case a man would grow desperate, and not care what he did. He that knows that whatever he does, he is miserable and undone, will not matter

how he demeans himself. All motives to repentance are gone, after a man once knows it will be to no purpose. And this the Scripture seems to represent to us, as the case of the devils and damned spirits. Because their state is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreversible sentence, therefore repentance is impossible to them.

Sorry no doubt they are, and heartily troubled, that, by their own sin and folly, they have brought this misery upon themselves, and they cannot but conceive an everlasting displeasure against themselves, for having been the cause and authors of their own ruin; and the reflection of this will be a perpetual spring of discontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation; and so long as they feel the intolerable punishments of sin, and groan under the insupportable torments of it, and see no end of this miserable state, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwise affected, than with discontent at themselves, and rage and fury against God.

They are indeed penitent so far, as to be troubled at themselves for what they have done; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them; they still hate God who inflicts these punishments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miserable state. The present anguish of their condition, and their despair of bettering it, makes them mad; and their minds are so distracted by the wildness of their passions, and their spirits so exasperated and set on fire by their own giddy motions, that there can be no rest and silence in their souls, not so much the liberty of one calm and sedate thought.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of their sins, and should entertain any thoughts of re-

turning to God and their duty, they are presently checked with this consideration, that their case is determined, that God is implacably offended with them, and is inexorably and peremptorily resolved to make them miserable for ever; and during this persuasion, no man can return to the love of God and goodness, without which there can be no repentance.

This consideration of the immutable state of men after this life, should engage us with all seriousness and diligence to endeavour to secure our future happiness. God hath "set before us good and evil, life and death," and we may yet choose which we please; but in the other world we must stand to that choice which we have made here, and inherit the consequences of it.

By sin mankind is brought into a miserable state; but our condition is not desperate and past remedy. God hath sent his Son "to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." So that though our case be bad, it need not continue so, if it be not our own fault. There is a possibility now of changing our condition for the better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual happiness for ourselves. The grace of God calls upon us, and is ready to assist us; so that no man's case is so bad, but there is a possibility of bettering it, if we be not wanting to ourselves, and will make use of the grace which God offers, who is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and assistance of this grace, those who are "dead in trespasses and sins," may "pass from death to life;" may be "turned from darkness to light," and "from the power of Satan unto God." So long as we are in this world there is a possibility of being trans-

lated from one state to another, from the dominion "of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son." But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and stand out against the offers of God's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, God will try us no more; our final miscarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we shall not be permitted to live over again to correct our errors. "As the tree falls so it shall lie;" such a state as we are settled in when we go out of this world, shall be fixed in the other, and there will be no possibility of changing it. We are yet "in the hand of our own counsel," and by God's grace we may mould and fashion our own fortune: but if we trifle away this advantage, we shall "fall into the hands of the living God," out of which there is no redemption. God hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us; and choose well, who can choose but once for all, and for ever. There is yet a space and opportunity left us of repentance; but so soon as we step out of this life, and are entered upon the other world, our condition will be sealed, never to be reversed: and because, after this life, there will be no further hopes of mercy, there will be no possibility of repentance. "This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation; therefore to-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; lest God swear in his wrath that ye shall not enter into his rest." I proceed, to a

Sixth observation; that a standing revelation of God is evidence sufficient for Divine things. "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them;" that is, they have the books of Moses and the prophets, written by men divinely inspired, these do

sufficiently declare to them the will of God, and their duty; and it is unreasonable to demand or expect that God should do more for their conviction and satisfaction.

I know very well the text speaks only of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, those of the New being not then extant when this parable was delivered. But what is here said concerning the Scriptures of the Old Testament, is equally applicable to the New: and though Abraham do only recommend Moses and the prophets, there is no doubt but he would have said the same concerning Christ and his apostles, if the books of the New Testament had been then extant. So that what I shall say upon this observation, does indifferently concern the whole Scripture.

And that I may make out this observation more fully, I shall take these five things into consideration:

1st, What we are to understand by a Divine revelation.

2dly, Give a brief account of the several kinds of it.

3dly, Shew what advantage this standing revelation of the Scriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of God to the world.

4thly, That there is sufficient evidence for the divinity of the Scriptures.

5thly, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for our conviction, than to afford such a standing revelation of his mind and will. I shall go over these as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1st, What we are to understand by a Divine re-

velation. By a Divine revelation we are to understand a supernatural discovery, or manifestation of any thing to us; I say supernatural, because it may either be immediately by God, or by the mediation of angels, as most, if not all the revelations of the Old Testament were. A supernatural discovery or manifestation, either immediately to our minds, by our understandings and inward faculties, (for I do not so well understand the distinction between understanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or else immediately to our understandings by the mediation of our outward senses, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and sound to the sense of hearing: a discovery or manifestation of a thing, whether it be such as cannot be known at all by the use of our natural reason and understandings; or such as may be discovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive consideration of it. For it is not at all unsuitable to the wisdom of God, to make a supernatural discovery to us of such things as may be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifestation of such truths as were more obscurely known, and did, as it were, lie buried in our understandings; or else to quicken our minds to a more serious and lively consideration of those truths.

2dly, For the several kinds of Divine revelations. That they were various, the apostle to the Hebrews tells us; (chap. i. 1.) "God who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the prophets;" where, by prophets, we are to understand not only those who did foretel future

things, but any person that was divinely inspired, and to whom God was pleased to make any supernatural discovery of himself.

Now the several kinds of revelation taken notice of by the Jews, are visions, dreams, prophecy, oracle, inspiration, or that which they call the Holy Ghost; voice Bath-col, or that which was highest of all, which they call *gradus Mosaicus*, the degree of revelation which was peculiar to Moses. The Jewish writers, especially Maimonides, have many subtle observations about the differences of these several kinds of revelation, which depend upon subtle and philosophical distinctions of the faculties of perception; as that some of these revelations were by impression only upon the understanding; some only upon the imagination; some upon both; some upon the outward senses; but the simple and plain difference between them, so far as there is any ground in Scripture to distinguish them, seems to be this:—vision was a representation of something to a man when he was waking, in opposition to dreams, which were representations made to men in their sleep. Prophecy might be either dream or vision; and the Jews observe, that it was always one of these two ways, which they grounded upon Numb. xii. 6. "If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream." But prophecy, in the strict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory or instructive, but did foretel some event of concernment to others; and the Jewish doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater assurance along with it; and that this was common to

all the three, that there was something of ecstasy and transport of mind in all these.

The fourth sort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is called Urim and Thummim, was a rendering of answers to questions, by the high-priest looking upon the stones in the breast-plate; which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth sort of revelation is that which they call the Holy Ghost, which was a more calm and gentle inspiration, without any extraordinary transport of mind or ecstasy, such as David had in the writing of the Psalms.

The lowest of all was that which they called Bath-col, which was by a voice from heaven; and this is the way of revelation, which the Jews observed, did only continue among them from the days of the prophet Malachi to our Saviour.

The highest of all was that which they called *gradus Mosaicus* to which the Jews give several prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation; as, that it was done by impression merely upon the understanding, without ecstasy, or rapture, or transport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his senses not bound up either by ecstasy or sleep; that it was a revelation immediately from God himself, and not by the mediation of angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other prophets; and the spirit of prophecy rested upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the story of him, that the spirit of prophecy did rest more constantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any discernible amaze-

ment or transport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impression merely upon his understanding, as that is a distinct faculty from the imagination, is not so certain: that it was always by an immediate communication from God, without the mediation of angels, seems not to be true; for St. Stephen tells us, that "the law was given by the disposition of angels," (Acts vii. 53.) And St. Paul, that it was "ordained by the angels in the hand of a mediator," that is, Moses, (Gal. iii. 19.) But that the revelation which was made to him, had some singular prerogatives above those of other prophets, is plain from Scripture, (Numb. xii. 5—8.) when Aaron and Miriam contended with Moses as being equal to him, God tells them that there was a vast difference between him and other prophets; "Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so—With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches," &c. (Exod. xxxiii. 11.) "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." (Deut. xxxiv. 10.) "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." All which signify at least this, that God made the clearest, and most familiar, and most perfect discoveries to Moses of any of the prophets; only our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom God hath discovered his will to us under the New Testament, did excel Moses; Moses being but a faithful servant, that is, *humilis amicus*, "a meaner sort of friend;" but the Lord Jesus Christ, "the only-begotten Son of God," who came from the bosom of his Father, and was intimately acquainted

with the secrets of his will, and " had not the Spirit given him by measure," but the most plentiful effusion of it, being " anointed above his fellows."

Now these being the several sorts and degrees of revelation, which God hath made of himself to the world, the Holy Scriptures are a system or collection of these, the authentic instrument or record, by which the things revealed any of these ways are transmitted to us, and is, therefore, called " the word of God," as containing those things which God, in several ages, hath spoken to the world; that is, matters of Divine revelation, which are necessary to be known by men, in order to their eternal happiness. And this being now the great and standing revelation of God, which is to continue to the end of the world, I intend to limit my discourse solely to this, as being the only revelation which we are concerned to inquire after.

And, therefore, in the third place, to shew you, what advantages this standing revelation of the Scriptures hath above private revelations made to particular persons, and frequently repeated and renewed in several ages; that so it may appear both agreeable to the wisdom of God to settle revelations in this way, as being more commodious; and likewise to his goodness, it being a real privilege which these latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixed and certain way of being acquainted with the will of God, than those ages had, which were governed by such private revelations, as were now and then made to particular persons: and the advantages are these:

1. It is a more certain way of conveyance of things, and more secure and free from imposture. Suppose a revelation made to a particular person,

which is of general concernment; that this may have a general and lasting effect, he must impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the best assurance he can of it; and these must relate it to others; and so it must pass from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report must needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary mistakes, through weakness of memory or understanding, and wilful falsifications and impostures, out of malice and design. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor lasting; it can but reach a few persons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the further it goes the weaker, like circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themselves, and the longer they continue, the less discernible they are, till at length they quite disappear. Whereas, being once recorded by persons secured from error, by supernatural and Divine assistance, they are not liable to those easy falsifications or mistakes, which traditional reports and relations are necessarily, through human malice or weakness, liable to.

2. It is a more general and universal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth most easily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propagated that way, lay equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally possible, that a common book, that passeth through all

hands, and which is of vast importance and concernment, should be liable to any material corruption, without a general conspiracy and agreement; which cannot be, but that it must be generally known. So that considering the commonness, and universal concernment of this book of the Scriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is sufficiently and competently assured of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing imposed upon by false copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwise; tradition being a very unequal and ununiform way of conveyance. For seeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the first hand; that is, immediately from him to whom it was made, but some at the second, others at the third, fourth, or fifth hand, or much further off; the credit of it will be necessarily weakened by every remove. A report that comes through many hands, being like the argument we call induction; and as the strength and goodness of that depends upon the truth of every one of those instances that make it up, so that if any of them fail, the whole argument is nought; so the credit of a report that passeth through twenty hands, depends upon the integrity and sufficiency of all the relators; and whatever there is either of falsehood and malice, or of incapacity of understanding, or frailty of memory, in any of the relators, so much of weakness is derived into the report or testimony; and consequently, the assurance which we can have of a private revelation, which is delivered traditionally through a great many persons, must needs be very unequal.

4. It is a more lasting way of conveyance. Which likewise appears by experience, we having now no-

thing at all of the history of ancient times, but what is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more human way of conveyance, which requires less of miracle and supernatural interposition for the preservation of it. This book of the Scriptures may with ordinary human care be transmitted entire, and free from any material error, to all succeeding ages: but revelations unwritten, if they have any lasting and considerable effect, they must, at least, in every age, be renewed and repeated; otherwise, in a very short space, either through the unfaithfulness, or carelessness, and frailty of men, they will either be quite lost, or so corrupted and depraved, that they will signify nothing.

From all which it appears, that we have so little cause to murmur and repine at the providence of God, which in these latter ages of the world does not make those more immediate discoveries and manifestations of himself to us, that he did to former ages; that we have rather great reason to admire the wisdom and goodness of God's providence, which hath privileged us with this standing revelation of his written word, which hath so many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in respect of the generality of mankind, is much more useful and effectual to its end. I know there are some that have endeavoured to persuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preserved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man so destitute of common sense as to believe them, contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the fourth thing I proposed to be considered; namely, That there is sufficient evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures. By the divinity

of the Scriptures, I mean that they were revealed by God, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but discovered to men by God; and that the penmen of these books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Now, if we can be satisfied of this, we ought to receive the Scriptures with the same reverence as if an angel from heaven should declare these things unto us, or as if God should immediately reveal them to our minds; for nothing can come with greater authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed by God; and provided we be assured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the same authority.

Now that we have sufficient evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures, will best appear by considering what is sufficient to give authority to a book, so that no prudent or reasonable man can question but that the book was writ by him whose name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we must not refuse in this case for the Scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally, and it is a sign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the Scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmost authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been transmitted down to us by the uncontrolled testimony of all ages, and that the authority of it was never questioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever since.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the Scriptures. As for the Old Testament, I shall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to itself, but shall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the New; which, if it be

proved, is sufficient evidence for it, though there were no other.

Now for the Scriptures of the New Testament, I desire but these two things to be granted to me at first:

1. That all were written by those persons whose names they bear: and for this we have as much authority as for any books in the world, and so much as may satisfy men in other cases, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That those who wrote those books were men of integrity, and did not wilfully falsify in any thing; and this cannot reasonably be denied, because these very persons gave the utmost evidence that men could give of their integrity. The highest attestation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the testimony of it; and this the apostles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falsify in their relations concerning the miracles of Christ, and his resurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the apostles after his ascension; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our Saviour was "a teacher come from God," and that the apostles were extraordinarily assisted by the Holy Ghost; and if this be granted, what can be desired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be said, that though the apostles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not wilfully falsify in their relations, yet they might be mistaken about those matters: but that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature; namely, that the things which are related are plain sensible matters of fact, about which

no man need mistake, unless he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might possibly have designs to deceive, but upon the surest evidence in the world, their own knowledge, and the testimony of their senses: "the things that we have seen and heard, testify we unto you." So that if they were mistaken in these things, no man can be sure of any thing; and by the same reason that we disbelieve the authority of the Scriptures upon this account, we must believe nothing at all. This is, in short, the whole force of the argument for the divinity of the Scriptures, which I might have enlarged infinitely upon; but I design now only briefly to represent to you, that we, who live at the distance of so many ages from the time of this revelation, are not destitute of sufficient evidence for the authority of the Scriptures, and such evidence, as they who reject in other cases, are esteemed unreasonable.

I should come now to the

5th, and last thing; namely, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for our conviction, than to afford us a standing revelation of his mind and will, such as the books of the Holy Scriptures are. But this I shall refer to another opportunity, in a particular discourse upon the 31st verse, which contains the main design, the sum and substance of this whole parable.

SERMON CXXVII.

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.—LUKE xvi. 31.

THESE words are the conclusion of that excellent parable of our Saviour concerning the rich man and Lazarus, and they are the final answer which Abraham gives to the rich man's last request; who being in great torment, and not able to obtain any ease for himself, is represented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth, lest they also, by their own carelessness and folly, should plunge themselves into the same misery that he was in; and therefore he begs of Abraham, that he would send Lazarus to his father's house, where he had "five brethren, that he might testify unto them, lest they also should come to that place of torment." To which request Abraham answers, that there was no necessity of such an extraordinary course to be used towards those who had sufficient means of conviction so near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make use of them. "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."

But the rich man presseth his request further, upon this reason, That they might not perhaps be moved by Moses and the prophets; nay, it was likely they would not be moved by them; for they

had always had them, and yet they remained impenitent: but if a special messenger should be sent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance: (ver. 30.) "And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." To which Abraham makes this peremptory reply, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

In which words Abraham absolutely denies that there is any such probability, much less certainty, that those who reject a public credible revelation of God, such as that of the Holy Scripture is, should be effectually convinced by a messenger from the dead. And our Saviour brings in Abraham delivering himself very positively in this matter, and therefore we may presume it to be our Saviour's own sense, and may rely upon it for a truth; which, however at first sight it may not be so evident, yet I hope in the progress of this discourse to make it sufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I shall premise a caution or two, to prevent all mistake in this matter.

First, That we are not to understand these words too strictly and rigorously, as if the thing were simply and in itself impossible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading Moses and the prophets, should be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very possible in the nature of the thing; yea, and likely enough, that a man who is not convinced by calm evidence and persuasion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a strange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known

when he was alive, should appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future state, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouse and awaken him to consider his danger, than all the threatenings of God's word; and it is very possible that, by the concurrence of God's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince such a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumstances be duly considered, that this should generally have a permanent effect upon men, so as thoroughly to reclaim such persons as do obstinately resist the light and counsels of God's word.

Secondly, Another caution I would give is this, that we are not to understand these words so as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles, for the proof and confirmation of a Divine doctrine; as if our Saviour intended to insinuate, that miracles are not a proper and sufficient argument to convince men. For our Saviour does not here oppose Moses and the prophets to a miraculous testimony; but he advanceth the public evidence and testimony which Moses and the prophets had above the evidence of a single and private miracle; for Moses and the prophets had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and attestation which God hath always given to the divinity of any person, or doctrine; and therefore Abraham cannot be thought to speak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, when he says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Nay, so far is he from that, that this reasoning of his is

rather for the advantage of miracles. For Moses and the prophets had the confirmation of many and great, of public and unquestionable miracles; a credible relation whereof was conveyed down to after ages. So that if rational means of conviction were the thing desired, it was not likely that those, who were not persuaded by Moses and the prophets, which were acknowledged by themselves to have had the confirmation of so many undoubted miracles, should, in reason, be convinced by a private and single miracle.

These considerations being premised by way of caution, I come now to make out the truth of what is here asserted in the text. And for the full clearing of this matter, I shall speak to these two propositions:

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the Holy Scriptures is. And if so, then,

Secondly, That upon the whole matter it is very improbable, that those who reject this public revelation of God, should be effectually convinced, though one should speak to them from the dead.

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the Holy Scriptures is. This is strongly implied in Abraham's first answer, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them;" as if he had said—having such means of conviction so near at hand, why should they desire and expect any other? It is in this case of the Scriptures, as in that of God's providence; God does not commonly

prove his providence to men by extraordinary instances of his power, and by changing the course of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it; but by standing testimonies of his wisdom, and power, and goodness; by these God does sufficiently satisfy considerate men of his government and care of the world; and though he do seldom manifest himself in supernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himself without a witness, by the constant course of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the seasons of the year, "in that he gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." And these standing arguments of his providence, though they be not so much taken notice of, because they are so common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we should be strangely amazed at them, but that they are so very frequent and familiar.

The case is the same as to Divine revelation. God hath not thought fit to gratify the perverse curiosity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will: but he hath given us a standing revelation, which at first had the greatest and most miraculous confirmation, and he hath still left us sufficient means of being assured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the first given to it; and we tempt God, by demanding extraordinary signs, when we may receive so abundant satisfaction in an ordinary way. This being admitted, I shall proceed, in the

Second place, to shew, That it is, upon the whole matter, and all circumstances considered, very improbable, that those who reject this public revela-

tion from God, should be effectually convinced, though one should speak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expressly asserted here in the text, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Not but that any man would be very much startled and amazed, if one should come from the dead to warn him out of the danger of his wicked life; but yet for all that, it is very unlikely that they, who obstinately and perversely refuse to be convinced by Moses and the prophets, would be effectually persuaded, (that is, so as to be brought to repentance and reformation of their lives) "though one should rise from the dead." And that for these reasons:

1. Because, if such miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reason to believe the threatenings of God's word, as the discourse of one that should speak to them from the dead.

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the counsels of God in his word, would, in all probability, hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

4. Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince those who are obstinately addicted and wedded to their lusts.

5. An effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and con-

currence of God's grace, which there is no reason to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means which God hath appointed to that end.

1. If such miracles, as a special messenger from the dead to warn and admonish men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon men; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all. For it is unreasonable at first sight, that the worst and most obstinate sort of sinners should expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themselves, and that God should not do as much for others, who have deserved it more, and would probably make better use of it; and, if these things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be, while the apprehension of such a thing were fresh upon them, they would take up some good resolutions; as sinners usually do, while they are under present convictions of conscience, and the hand of God, by some great affliction or sickness, lies heavy upon them: but still they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off till the present amazement were a little over, and the terror of their first apprehensions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former course. And this is too probable, from what we see men do in other cases, not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to see a man die, and solemnly take his last leave of the world. The very circumstances of dying men are apt to strike us with horror: to hear such a man how sensibly he will speak of the

other world, as if he were just come from it, rather than going to it; how severely he will condemn himself for the folly and wickedness of his life; with what passion he will wish that he had lived better, and served God more sincerely; how seriously he will resolve upon a better life, if God would be pleased to raise him up, and try him but once more; with what zeal and earnestness he will commend to his best friends and nearest relations a religious and virtuous course of life, as the only thing that will minister comfort to them, when they come to be in his condition. Such discourses as these are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to stir up in them very good resolutions, whilst the present fit and impression lasts: but, because these sights are very frequent, they have seldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men consider that it is a very common case, and sinners take example and encouragement from one another; every one is affected for the present, but few are so effectually convinced, as to betake themselves to a better course.

And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to die, we may reasonably presume that the discourses of dead and dying, of those that are going, and those who come from the dead, would have much the same effect upon the generality of men.

But if we suppose this a singular case (which there is no reason to do), in that case the effect would probably be this; a man that was strongly addicted to his lusts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt, when the fright was over, to be easily persuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination; and the rather, because such things did not happen to others as well as to himself.

2. We have as great or greater reason to believe the warnings and threatenings of God's word, as the discourses of one that should come to us from the dead. For the threatenings of God's word against such sins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their side, the particular testimony of every man's conscience, and the concurrent testimony of mankind to the probability of the thing; and to give us full assurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unquestionable miracles, wrought on purpose to give testimony to those persons who denounced those threatenings, that they came from God. So that here is a very public and authentic testimony given to the threatenings of God's word, more suitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition, or a single miracle; and if that will not convince men, why should we suppose that this will?

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the counsels of God in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence, that men do not yield a full and effectual assent to the truth of God's word; I mean, that they do not believe it so as to obey it; but from the interest of some lust. The true cause is not in men's understandings, and because there is not reason enough to satisfy them, that the Scriptures are the word of God: but in the obstinacy of their wills, which are enslaved to their lusts. And, the disease being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more consideration, and by the grace of God, and better resolutions.

The man is addicted to some vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain those truths which would check and control him in his course. The light of God's word is offensive to him, and therefore he would shut it out. This account our blessed Saviour gives of the enmity of the Jews against him and his doctrine: (John iii. 19.) "Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." Upon the same account it is, that men resist the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures; not because they have sufficient reason to doubt of their Divine authority; but because they are unwilling to be governed by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: for the wills of men have a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy or difficult; and as men are apt to assent to what they have a mind to, so they are slow to believe any thing which crosseth their humours and inclinations; so that though greater evidence were offered, it is likely it would not prevail with them, because the matter does not stick there. Their wills are distempered, men hate to be reformed, and this makes them "cast the laws of God behind their backs;" and if God himself should speak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of Israel, yet for all that they might continue "a stiff-necked and rebellious people." Though the evidence were such as their understandings could not resist, yet their wills might still hold out, and the present condition of their minds might have no lasting influence upon their hearts and lives; such a violent conviction might affect them for

the present, but the sense of it might, perhaps, wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardness. Men, by a long and obstinate continuance in sin, may bring themselves to the temper and disposition of devils; who, though they believe and tremble at the thoughts of God and his threatenings, yet they are wicked still; for so long as men retain a strong affection for their lusts, they will break through all conviction; and what evidence soever be offered to them, they will find some way or other to avoid it, and to delude themselves. The plain truth of the case is this (if men will honestly speak their consciences, they cannot deny it); they do not call for more evidence, either because they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it, but that they may seem to have some excuse for themselves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4thly, Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and such as are obstinately addicted to their lusts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the history of the Bible. What wonders were wrought in the sight of Pharaoh and the Egyptians! yet they were hardened under all these plagues. Balaam, who greedily followed the wages of unrighteousness, was not to be stopped by the admonition of an angel. The Jews, after so many miracles which their eyes had seen, continued to be a "stiff necked and gainsaying people;" so that it is hard to say which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions against him; and when, in the fulness of time, the Son of God came, and did among them the works which never man did,

such as one would have thought might have brought the worst people in the world to repentance, those of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, yet they repented not. Yea, the very thing which the rich man here in my text requested of Abraham for his brethren, was done among them; Lazarus did rise from the dead, and testified unto them, and they were not persuaded.

And, which is yet more, our Saviour himself, according to his own prediction while he was alive, "rose again from the dead the third day," and was visibly taken up into heaven; and yet, how few among them did believe, and give glory to God? So that we see the very thing here spoken of in the text, made good in a famous instance; they who "believed not Moses and the prophets," which testified of the Messias, were not persuaded when "he rose from the dead."

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of God have had upon those who were not reclaimed by his word? It is not long since God shewed himself among us, by "terrible things in righteousness," and visited us with three of his sorest judgments, war, and pestilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedness and impiety still reign and rage among us? It is a very sad consideration to see how little those who have outlived these plagues, have been reformed by them; "We have not returned to the Lord, nor sought him for all this."

I may appeal to the experience of particular persons. How frequently do we see men, after great afflictions, and tedious sufferings, and dangerous sicknesses, return to their former evil courses! and though they have been upon the brink of eternity,

and " the terrors of death have compassed them about, and the pains of hell have almost taken hold of them ;" though they have had as lively and sensible convictions of another world, as if they had spoken with those that had come from thence, or even been there themselves; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery have been as mad, as furious sinners, as they were before; so that it ought to be no such wonder to us, which the text tells us, that if men " hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Especially, if we consider, in the

5th and last place, That an effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentanceand a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by God for that end. To be effectually persuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the assistance of God's grace ; and there is little reason to expect that God will afford his grace to those who reject and despise the counsels of his word. The doctrine of salvation contained in the Holy Scriptures, and the promises and threatenings of God's word, are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the conversion of men, and to bring them to repentance ; and if we sincerely use these means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of God's grace to make them effectual ; but if we neglect and resist these means, in confidence that God should attempt our recovery, by some extraordinary ways; though he should gratify our presumptuous and un-

reasonable curiosity, so far as to send one from the dead to testify unto us; yet we have no reason to expect the assistance of his grace, to make such a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have so long despised his word, and resisted his Spirit, which are "the power of God unto salvation."

Without his grace and assistance the most probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures; "by grace we are saved," and "that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." This grace is revealed to us in the gospel; and the assistances of it are conveyed to us by the gospel; and it is great presumption to promise to ourselves the assistance of God's grace in any other way than he hath been pleased to promise it to us.

And thus I have shewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that those who obstinately reject a clear and public revelation of God should be effectually convinced, and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I shall only make two or three inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1st, Since the Scriptures are the public and standing revelation of God's will to men, and the ordinary means of salvation, we may hence conclude, that people ought to have them in such a language as they can understand. This our Saviour plainly supposeth in the discourse which he represents between Abraham and the rich man, desiring that Lazarus might be sent from the dead, to his brethren, to "testify unto them:" to which request Abraham would not have given this answer and advice, "they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them," had he supposed that the Scriptures then were, or for the future ought

to be, locked up from the people in an unknown tongue; for the rich man might very well have replied, "Nay, father Abraham," but they are not permitted to have Moses and the prophets in such a language as they can understand; and therefore there is more need why one should be sent from the dead to "testify unto them."

Nor would Abraham have said again, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded." For how should men hear what they cannot understand, so as to be persuaded by it?

It is evident, then, that our Saviour, according to the reasoning of this parable, takes it for granted, that the Holy Scriptures are the standing and ordinary means of bringing men to faith and repentance, and that the people are to have the free use of them. But since our Saviour's time, the church of Rome hath found a mighty inconvenience in this, and, therefore, hath taken the Scriptures out of the hands of the people. They will not now let them have Moses and the prophets, the gospel of our blessed Saviour, and the writings of his apostles, because they are really afraid they should hear them, and, by hearing of them, be convinced and persuaded of the errors and corruptions of their church; but instead of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, they have put into their hands a legend of famous apparitions of men from the dead, testifying unto them, concerning purgatory and transubstantiation, and the worship of the blessed Virgin and the saints, and the great benefit and refreshment which souls in purgatory have, by the indulgences of the pope, and the prayers of the living, put up to saints and angels on their behalf; so that in the church of Rome, quite contrary

to our Saviour's method, men are persuaded of their religion, of their new articles of faith, and ways of worship, not by Moses and the prophets, not by the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures (for they every where testify against them), but by absurd romances, and ill-contrived fictions of apparitions from the dead. I will dismiss this matter with this one observation, that however interested and confident men may set a bold face upon any thing, yet it cannot to considerate men but seem a very hard case, that there should be no salvation to be had out of the church of Rome; and yet the ordinary, and (in our Saviour's judgment) the most effectual means of salvation are not to be had in it.

But I pass from this to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2dly, Let us hear and obey that public revelation of God's will, which, in so much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleased to afford to us. This is an inestimable privilege and advantage which the world, in many ages, was destitute of; having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happiness but the light of nature, and some particular revelations, which now and then God was pleased to make of his will to men: but now God hath set up a great and standing light in the world, the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures; and, by the gospel of his blessed Son, hath "given the knowledge of salvation to all men, for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercies of God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace," to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duty. "We, upon whom the ends of the world

are come," do enjoy all the advantages of Divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever shall have. " God, in these last days, hath spoken unto us by his Son ;" and if we will not hear him, God will employ no other extraordinary prophet and messenger to us. " If the wrath of God, so clearly revealed from heaven by the gospel of our blessed Saviour, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ;" if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torments ; if the dreadful sufferings of the Son of God for our sins, and the merciful offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happiness, will not prevail with us to leave our sins, and to amend our lives, we have no reason to expect that God should use any farther means to reclaim us ; that he should ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

3dly, and lastly, Those who are not brought to repentance, and effectually persuaded by this clear and public revelation, which God hath made of his will to men in the Holy Scriptures, have reason to look upon their case as desperate.

Methinks it should not be a desirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is so dreadful and full of terror ; besides that, it argues men to be strangely hardened in a bad course, and obstinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their sins, but what will almost put them out of their wits; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearful and ghastly messenger from thence. What a terrible sight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in the world, fresh come out of those flames, with a

smell of fire and brimstone upon him! What imagination can paint to itself the dread and horror of such a spectacle! The rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is represented as sensible of the inconvenience of this; and, therefore, he did not desire to be sent himself to his brethren, but desired that Lazarus might go and testify unto them: he was apprehensive how frightful a sight he himself must needs have been to them; and, therefore, he desires that they might have a gentler warning by one, who, from out of Abraham's bosom, had seen the miseries of the damned, but enjoyed the state of the blessed.

But let not us tempt God by any such unreasonable demand, who speaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late years called so loudly upon us by the voice of his providence, to repent and turn to him: by so many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as God hardly ever wrought for any prince and people, and by such terrible volleys of judgments, and full vials of wrath, as have seldom been poured out upon any nation. God speaks to you by his ministers, men like yourselves (God knows, poor frail and sinful men!) but we are sure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleasure, the counsels and commands of the great God, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your most awful attention and regard. And we are sensible that we are called to a very difficult and unpleasant work, to contend with the lusts and vices of men, to strive against the strong and impetuous stream of a wicked and perverse generation; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous impor-

tunity, but a great and just sense of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take these warnings, why should we expect that God should vouchsafe to send an express messenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not so much to help the weakness of our faith, as to humour the perverseness of our infidelity? And why should we imagine that this course would prove more effectual? "Let us not deceive ourselves;" the same lusts which now detain men so strongly in impenitency and unbelief, would, in all probability, hurry them on to hell, though an angel from heaven should meet them in their way, to give a stop to them. This, indeed, might startle us; but nothing is like to save us, if the word of God, and his grace, do not.

But are we in earnest, and would we "be persuaded if one should rise from the dead?" God hath condescended thus far to us, there is one risen from the dead to testify unto us, Jesus the Son of God, who "died for our sins, and rose again for our justification," and is ascended into heaven, and set down at the right hand of God, to assure us of a blessed resurrection, and a glorious immortality: and, if this will not satisfy us, God will gratify our curiosity no farther. If we "will not believe him whom God hath sent," and, to convince us that he hath sent him, hath "raised him up from the dead," we shall die in our sins, and perish in our impenitency. God hath, in great mercy to mankind, done that which is abundantly sufficient to convince those who are of a teachable temper and disposition; but, in great wisdom and justice, he hath not thought fit to provide any remedy for the wilful obstinacy, and intractable perverseness, of men.

Now God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, persuade us all to "break off our sins by repentance, and to give glory to God," before death and darkness come, and the day of our final visitation overtake us, when we may, perhaps, be surprised by a sudden stroke, or seized upon by a violent disease, and may have no sense and apprehension of our approaching danger; or, if we have, may find "no place for repentance, though we seek it with tears:" which God grant may never happen to be the case of any of us, for his mercy's sake in Christ Jesus! "To whom, with the Father," &c.

SERMON CXXVIII.

[Preached at Whitehall, Ann. 1683.]

THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD WISER THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.—LUKE xvi. 8.

THESE words are in the parable of the rich man's steward, who, being called upon to give up his accounts, in order to his being discharged from his office, cast about with himself what course he had best to take, to provide for his subsistence, when he should be turned out of his employment: at last he resolves upon this, that he will go to his lord's debtors, and take a favourable account of them, and instead of "a hundred measures of oil, write down fifty;" and instead of "a hundred measures of wheat, write down fourscore;" that, by this means, he might oblige them to be kind to him in his necessity. The lord, hearing of this, commends the unjust steward, "because he had done wisely;" that is, he took notice of his dishonesty, but praised his shrewdness and sagacity, as having done prudently for himself, though he did not deal justly with him. And this is usual among men; when we see a man ingeniously bad, to commend his wit, and to say, it is a great pity he doth not use it better, and apply it to good purposes. Upon the whole, our Saviour makes this observation: That "the children of this world are in their generation wiser

than the children of light;" as if he had said, thus did this worldly wise man; thus provident was he for his future security and subsistence. He no sooner understands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he considers what provision to make for himself against that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wisdom to better and greater purposes? For is not every man such a steward, entrusted by God with the blessings of this life, and many opportunities of doing good? For all which, since he must shortly give an account, he ought, in all reason, so to use them, as thereby to provide for the happiness of another life, against this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may see by our Saviour's application of it. For parables are not to be stretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumstances of them, but only to be applied to the particular point and purpose intended. A parable, and the moral accommodation of it, being (as one well observes) not like two planes, which touch one another in every part, but like a globe upon a plane, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our Saviour separates the wisdom of this steward from his injustice, and proposeth that to our imitation: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

The words are a comparison, in which we have,

1st, The persons compared, "the children of this world," and "the children of light." It is a very usual phrase among the Hebrews, when they would express any thing to partake of such a nature or quality, to call it the son or child of such a thing. Thus good men are called "the children of God."

and bad men "the children of the devil;" those who mind earthly things, and make the things of this world their greatest aim and design, are called "the children of this world;" and those who are better enlightened with the knowledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a future state after this life, are called "the children of light."

2dly, Here is the thing wherein they are compared, and that is, as to their wisdom and prudence.

3dly, The object of this prudence, which is not the same in both; as if the sense were, that "the children of this world are wiser than the children of light," as to the things of this world; but here are two several objects intended, about which the prudence of these two sorts of persons is respectively exercised, the concernments of this world and the other: and our Saviour's meaning is, that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation," that is, in their way; *viz.* as to the interests and concernments of this world, "than the children of light" are in theirs; *viz.* as to the interests and concernments of the other world.

4thly, Here is a decision of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in their way; and our Saviour gives it to the "children of this world;" they "are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

Now this proposition is not to be taken in the utmost strictness and rigour, as if it were universally true, and without any exception, as if no man had ever been so wise and provident for his soul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the interests and concernments of this life. For there are some that are fools at large, and

imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to their affairs of this world and the other; who are, in too strict a sense, "the children of this world:" they mind nothing but this world, and yet are grossly imprudent, even in their prosecution of their temporal interests; they neglect and forego all other worldly advantages for the sake of a little sensual pleasure; and then they lose and destroy that too, by an over hot and eager pursuit of it, and turn it at last into gall and wormwood. And there are others (as St. Paul for instance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent, and zealous, and industrious for the promoting of religion, and the salvation of themselves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this present life; and I hope there are some such in every age; but, God knows, there are very few, and their wisdom and industry is seldom so equal, and constant, and uniform, as that of the men of this world.

So that we are to understand this saying of our Saviour's with the same allowance as we generally do all moral and proverbial speeches, that they are true for the most part, and the instances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is seldom seen, that good men are so wise for the concernments of their souls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly interest.

In speaking to this proposition, I shall do these three things:

First, Confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom.

Secondly, Give some probable account of this, by considering, what advantages "the children of this world" have above "the children of light."

Thirdly, I shall draw some inferences from the whole, by way of application.

First, I shall endeavour to confirm and illustrate the truth of this, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom. Now this is wisdom, to mind and regard our chief end, and by all means to promote it: and this regard to our chief end doth express itself chiefly in these particulars—in our being firmly fixed and resolved upon it; in choosing the fittest means for the compassing and accomplishing of it; in a diligent use of those means; in an invincible constancy and perseverance in the prosecution of it; and in making all things to submit and to stoop to it. These are the principal parts and properties of wisdom; and I shall shew, that in all these "the children of this world" do usually excel "the children of light."

1st, They are usually more firmly fixed and resolved upon their end. Whatever they set up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleasures, they are fixed upon it, and steady in the prosecution of it. If they set up for riches or honour, they neglect and despise pleasure, if it cross either of those ends. And this fixed resolution of the end, is the great spring of action, and that which inspires men with vigour and diligence in the use of means; and the more resolved men are upon the end, the more active and industrious they will be in the use of means; for the end governs the means, and gives law and measure to our activity and industry in the use of them, and sweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fixed and resolved upon, there will not be wanting fervour of prosecution; but, if we be wavering and unsteady

as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerness of our pursuit, and, according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconstancy into all our motions. "The double-minded man (as St. James says) is unstable in all his ways." Now "the children of this world" are commonly more fixed and resolved upon their end, than "the children of light." It is rare to see the whole life and actions of a good man, so constantly and uniformly conspiring to the furtherance of his great end, so directly tending to the salvation of his soul, and the increase of his glory and happiness in another world, as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole course of his life, do to the advancing of his worldly interests. The covetous or ambitious men seldom do any thing, to the best of their knowledge, that is impertinent to their end, much less contrary to it; through every thing that they do, one may plainly see the end they aim at, and that they are always true to it: whereas the best men do many things which are plainly cross and contrary to their end, and a great many more which have no relation to it; and when they mind it, it is rather by fits and starts, than in any even course and tenor of actions.

And of this we have a famous instance in that worldly and secular church, which now for several hundreds of years hath more steadily pursued the end of secular greatness and dominion, than any other church hath done for the ends of true religion, the glory of God, and the salvation of the souls of men; so that there is hardly any doctrine or practice peculiar to that church, and differing from our common Christianity, but it hath a direct and visible

tendency to the promoting of some worldly interest or other. For instance: why do they deny the people the Holy Scriptures, and the service of God, in a language which they can understand; but that, by keeping them in ignorance, they may have them in more perfect slavery and subjection to them? Why do they forbid their priests to marry, but that they may have no interest distinct from that of their church, and leave all to it when they die? To what end is auricular confession, but to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their secrets? Why must the laity only receive the sacrament in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the priest, whose privilege it shall be to receive in both? And why is the intention of the priest necessary to the efficacy of the sacraments, but to persuade the people, that, notwithstanding the gracious intention of God toward mankind, they cannot be saved without the good-will of the priest? The doctrines of purgatory and indulgences are a plain device, to make their markets of the sins and souls of men. I might instance in a hundred things more in that church, which are of the same tendency. This St. John foretold should be the character of the spirit of antichrist, that it should be a worldly spirit, and the doctrines of it should serve a secular interest and design: (1 John iv. 5.) "They are of the world, and they speak from the world, and the world hears them." What church is there in the world, so true throughout to the interest of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own secular power and greatness?

2dly, "The children of this world" are wiser in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wisdom: for some means will

bring about an end with less pains, and difficulty, and expense of time, than others. And the men of the world are very ingenious in discerning the fitness and force of means to their several ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of rising to honour and preferment! What long trains will men lay to bring about their desired end! What subtle methods have men devised, to insinuate themselves into court; and, when they are there, to plant themselves in the eye of their prince, and in the sunshine of his favour: and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of screwing themselves in!

But, in the concernments of our souls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we! and how awkwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were "only wise to do evil, but to do good had no understanding," as the prophet complains! By what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would seem to be, and sometimes, perhaps, are, very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote God's glory, by pious frauds, and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for God! What a compass do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worship, by voluntary severities, neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to men! by tedious pilgrimages and senseless ceremonies, and innumerable little external observances, of no virtue or efficacy in religion! and by wandering through a wilderness of opinions, and the bushes and brakes of unprofitable questions and controversies! Whereas the way to heaven lies plain and straight before us, consisting in simplicity of belief, and in holiness and innocency of life. Not but that there are great

differences in the church of Rome between the secular priests and the regular; between the Jansenists and the Jesuits; but they still unite in a common interest, and are subject to antichrist, their common head. They do not separate from one another, and excommunicate one another, and declare against one another that they are not of the true church; Satan never casts out Satan; and, though he loves divisions among Christians, yet he always takes care that his own kingdom be not divided against itself, so as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful design for the extirpation of protestants, they can lay aside their enmities, and be reconciled in such a design. Then the pope and the kings of the earth "take counsel together," and, like Herod and Pilate when Christ was to be crucified, can be made friends at a day's warning. Whereas the divisions of the true church are pernicious to it, and, as we see at this day among ourselves, our senseless differences and wild heats on both sides, do contribute to the setting up of popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion, and yet no persuasion, no experience, can make us wiser.

3dly, "The children of this world" are commonly more diligent in the use of means for the obtaining of their end; they will sweat and toil, and take any pains, "rise up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulness;" their thoughts are continually running upon their business, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature, and harass it; and rob themselves of their rest, and all the comfort of their lives, to raise their fortune and estate. What drudges were Cæsar and Alexander in the way of fame and ambition! How did

they tire themselves and others with long and tedious marches! To what inconveniences and dangers did they expose themselves and thousands more! What havoc and destruction did they make in the world, that they might gain to themselves the empty title of conquerors of it! When the men of the world engage in any design, how intent are they upon it, and with what vigour do they prosecute it! They do not counterfeit a diligence, and seem to be more serious and industrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetousness and ambition, and not seem to aspire after riches and honours so much as indeed they do.

But in the pursuit of better things, how cold and remiss are we! With what a careless indifference do most men mind their souls! How negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical, are they in the service of God, and the exercise of religion! With what a pitiful courage, and with what faint spirits, do they resist sin, and encounter the temptations of it! and how often and how easily are they foiled and baffled by them!

4thly, The men of the world are more invincibly constant and pertinacious in the pursuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or dashed out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing short of his end and aim, to take him off from the prosecution of it; he scorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his interest. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleasure to get his money from him; how generously will this mean-spirited man trample upon pleasure,

when it would tempt him from his design of being rich!

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and set a keener edge upon their spirits. Give an ambitious man almost a demonstration of the impossibility of his attempts; *contra audentior ibit*, he will go on so much the more boldly and resolutely. In the ways of religion, men are apt to be discouraged and put out of countenance by contempt and reproach; but a covetous man is not to be jeered and flirted out of his money and estate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to those that are not so, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi sibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himself in his bags, when the world hisseth at him; he can bear "to be hated and persecuted, and have all manner of evil spoke against him" for money's sake: and in the pursuit of these designs, men will with great resolution encounter enmity and opposition, and endure great sufferings and persecution. How many have been martyrs to their lusts, and have sacrificed their ease and health, and even their lives, in the prosecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous designs!

But, on the other hand, how easily are men checked and diverted from a good course, by the temptations and advantages of this world! How many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendship of this world! and as their goods and estates have grown greater, their devotion hath grown less! How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehension of danger and sufferings;

and, by their fearful imaginations, to make them greater than they are, and, with the people of Israel, to be disheartened from all further attempts of entering "into the land of promise," because it is "full of giants, and the sons of Anak!" How easily was Peter frighted into the denial of his Master! And when our Saviour was apprehended, how did his disciples forsake him, and fly from him! And though they were constant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and steeled against the fear of suffering.

5thly, The men of the world will make all things stoop and submit to that which is their great end and design; their end rules them, and governs them, and gives laws to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not serve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man seek wealth, it is but in order to his design to purchase friends, and strengthen his interest, and to make his rising the easier; he will lay his whole estate at the stake, rather than miss of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleasure, when it lies cross to his interest; if he have any expensive lust and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for some more frugal and profitable sin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concernments of our souls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and consideration of their great end! and, instead of making other things submit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior interest. They make heaven stoop to earth, and religion to serve a worldly design; and the glory of God to give way to gain, and the great concernments of their souls, and their eternal salvation, to

their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that respect which is due to it, and will suffer nothing to take place of it in their esteem and affection; and if men were as wise for their souls, and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happiness. I proceed, in the

Second place, To give some account of this, whence it comes to pass, that "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." And this I shall do, by considering what advantages "the children of this world" have as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have as to the concernments of another world. I shall instance in four or five of the chief.

1st, The things of this world are present and sensible, and, because of their nearness to us, are apt to strike powerfully upon our senses, and to affect us mightily, to excite our desires after them, and to work strongly upon our hopes and fears: but the things of another world being remote from us, are lessened by their distance, and consequently are not apt to work so powerfully upon our minds. They are invisible to us, and only discerned by faith, which is a more obscure and less certain perception of things, than we have of those objects which are presented to our bodily eyes. "The things which God hath prepared for them that love him," the glory and happiness of the next world, are "things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard." "The children of light" do not see God, "as the children of this world see mammon."

2dly, The sensual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better suited, and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than spiritual and heavenly things are to those that are regenerate. In this lapsed and degenerate state of mankind, appetite and sense are apt to prevail above reason, and therefore those things which are most delightful to sense, we favour and mind, and love to busy ourselves about them, because they are most suitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reason of this is plain, because that principle in worldly and sensual men, which pursues earthly things, is in those who are unregenerate entire and undivided, and consequently the affections and inclinations of the whole man, do all tend one way, and run out towards those things in a full and undivided stream; whereas good men are but regenerate in part; and though they have a principle of spiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great struggling and conflict between flesh and spirit, and it is a great while before the spiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and get a perfect victory over our sensual appetites and inclinations. Men's affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they pursue these things with all their might; but the best men are but good in part, and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hindered in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and sensual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly subdued and brought under in this world.

3dly, The worldly man's faith and hope, and fear of present and sensible things, is commonly stronger than a good man's faith and hope, and fear

of things future and eternal. Now faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear sway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly persuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and possessed with good hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehensions of the danger of missing it, this man may almost be put upon any thing. The merchant traffics, and the husbandman ploughs and sows in faith, and hopes that God will bless his labours, that he shall reap the fruit of them, and plainly sees, that if he do not take this pains he must starve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as "the children of this world" do concerning the things of this world! If any man ask me, how I know this? I appeal to experience; it is plain and visible in the lives and actions, and endeavours of men. Good men are seldom so effectually and thoroughly persuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the sayings contained in the Holy Scriptures, as the men of the world are of their own sayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that "honesty is the best policy;" or, as Solomon expresseth it, that "he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely;" as the men of the world believe their own maxims, that "a man may be too honest to live;" that "plain dealing is a jewel, but he that wears it shall die a beggar." Few men's hopes of heaven are so powerful and vigorous, and have so sensible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not so afraid to swear, as they are to speak treason; they are not so firmly persuaded of the danger of sin to their souls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which some crimes against

the laws of men do expose their temporal lives and safety; therefore they will many times venture to offend God, rather than incur the penalty of human laws.

4thly, The men of the world have but one design, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind may easily be skilled and excel in it. When a man makes one thing his whole business, no wonder if he be very knowing and wise in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care and concernment for any thing else. It is a saying, I think, of Thomas Aquinas, *Cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum*, "He is a dangerous man that reads but one book;" he that gives his mind but to one thing must needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, especially in matters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furnisheth him with observations about it, and these make him wise and prudent in that thing.

But good men, though they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the business and necessities of this life do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other, and though there be but one thing necessary in comparison, yet the conveniences of this life are to be regarded; and though our souls be our main care, yet some consideration must be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the service of our souls; some provision must be made for their present support, so long as we continue in these earthly tabernacles; and this will necessarily engage us in the world, so that we cannot always

and wholly apply ourselves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5thly, and lastly, The men of the world have a greater compass and liberty in the pursuit of their worldly designs, than good men have in the prosecution of their interests. The "children of light" are limited and confined to the use of lawful means for the compassing of their ends; but the men of the world are not so straight-laced, *quocunque modo rem;* they are resolved upon the point, and will stick at no means to compass their end. They do not stand upon the nice distinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by speculative and scrupulous men, to puzzle business, and to hinder and disappoint great designs. If Ahab have a mind to Naboth's vineyard, and Naboth will not let him be honest, and have it for a valuable consideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way; Naboth shall, by a false witness, be made a traitor, and his vineyard, by this means, shall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjust steward in the parable provided for himself; he wronged his lord, to secure a retreat to himself in the time of his distress.

The third and last thing only remains, to make some inferences from what hath been said by way of application. And,

1st, Notwithstanding the commendation which hath been given of the wisdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is, indeed, great in its way and kind; but it is applied to little and low purposes, employed about the concernments of a short time and a few days, about the worst and meanest part of ourselves, and accompanied with the neglect of

greater and better things, such as concern our souls, and our whole duration, even our happiness to all eternity. And, therefore, that which the world admires and cries up for wisdom, is, in the esteem of God, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. "The wisdom of the world (saith St. Paul) is foolishness with God." The rich man in the parable, who increased his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himself, and was, no doubt, applauded by others for a very wise man: but because "he laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God;" that is, did not employ his estate to good and charitable purposes; therefore God, who calls nobody out of his right name, calls this man, "fool:" "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall all these things be?" And our Saviour here in the text, while he commends the wisdom of "the children of this world," he adds that which is a considerable blemish and abatement to it: "The children of this world are wiser, εἰς τῆς γενεὰν τῶν ἑαυτῶν, for their age," for the concernments of this present life; but this is but a short and purblind wisdom, which sees but a little way, and considers only things present and near at hand; whereas true wisdom hath a larger and farther prospect, and regards the future as well as the present, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our Saviour gives the wisdom of this world its utmost due when he says, "The children of this world are wiser for their generation;" for this is the very best that can be said of it, it seldom looks so far, and holds out so long. Many men have survived their own projects, and have lived to see the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious

designs. So the prophet tells us: (Jer. xvii. 11.) "As the partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not, so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool."

This is wisdom, to regard our main interest; but if we be wrong in our end (as all worldly men are), the faster and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and mistake. "The children of this world" are out in their end, and mistaken in the main; they are wise for this world, which is inconsiderable to eternity; wise for a little while, and fools for ever.

2dly, From what hath been said, we may infer, that if we lose our souls, and come short of eternal happiness, it is through our own fault and gross neglect; for we see that men are wise enough for this world; and the same prudence, and care, and diligence, applied to the concernments of our souls, would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our Saviour here in the text tells us, that usually less wisdom and industry than the men of this world use about the things of this world, is exercised by "the children of light," who yet at last, through the mercy of God, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal souls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies, and be as heartily concerned for the unseen world, and for eternity, as they are for things visible and temporal, they would, with much more certainty, gain heaven, than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conscience desire more than to be happy for ever, upon as easy and upon more certain terms than any man can be rich or great in this world? For we may miss of these things after

all our travail and pains about them; or, if we get them, we may lose them again: but if we "seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness," if we be sincerely good, we are sure to have the reward of it, even that "eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised;" if we "lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven," they will be safe and secure there, where "no moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."

If we would seriously think of the other world, and were thoroughly possessed with a firm belief of the eternity of that happiness or misery which remains for men after this life, we should pray to God, and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion with the same care and concernment, with the same fervour and intention of mind, as men prosecute their worldly business. Were we fully persuaded of the unseen glories and torments of the other world, we should be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of sense; because in reason they are much more considerable. The disgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlasting shame and confusion? The fear of death will deter many men from robbing and stealing, who would perhaps venture upon these crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the second death, of the "worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched," have as great an awe and influence upon us? If they have not, it is a sign that we do not equally believe the danger of human laws and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the same belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about these

things would be more equal. For we are not so weak as we make ourselves; we are not yet so degenerate, but, if we would set ourselves seriously to it, and earnestly beg the assistance of God's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our understandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulse of our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of God is ready to supply. We can go to church, and we can hear the word of God; and we can consider what we hear; we can pray to God, and say, "We believe, Lord help our unbelief," and enable us to do what thou requirest of us; and we can forbear a great many sins, which we rashly and wilfully run into: a great present danger will fright us from sin, a terrible storm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a sharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a master or magistrate will restrain men from many things, which they say they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make ourselves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied: for if fear will restrain us, it is a sign that we can forbear; if the rod of affliction will fetch it out of us, and make us do that which, at other times, we say we are unable to do, this is a demonstration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the assistance of God's grace; but that assistance which we may have for asking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were searched to the bottom, it is not want of power that hinders us from doing our duty, but sloth and negligence;

for God hath " given us exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we may be made partakers of a Divine nature;" and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to ourselves, we may " cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God."

3dly, and lastly, What a shame and reproach is this to the children of light! Our Saviour speaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of comparison which he useth, that " the children of this world should be wiser than the children of light," that is, than " wisdom's own children; and that they should be " wiser in their generation," that is, for the concernments of a short and inconsiderable time, than the others are for all eternity.

How should it make our blood to rise in our faces, and fill us with confusion, that the men of this world should be more prudent and skilful in the contrivance and management of their little affairs; more resolute and vigorous in the prosecution of them, than we are about the everlasting concernments of our souls! That a worldly church should use wiser and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and superstition, than we do to build up the true church of Christ in knowledge, and faith, and charity! That the men of the world should toil and take more pains for the deceitful riches, than we do for the true; and be contented to hazard more for a corruptible crown, than we for an incorruptible! That they should love pleasure more than we do God, and mind their bodies and temporal estates more than we do our souls and our eternal happiness!

Do but observe the men of the world—what a

pace they go, what large and nimble steps they take in the pursuit of earthly things; they do not seek riches as if they sought them not, and love the world as if they loved it not, and enjoy the present delights of this world, as if they possessed them not; though the fashion of this world passeth away: but we seek heaven, as if we sought it not, and love God as if we loved him not, and mind eternity, and the world to come, as if we minded them not; and yet the fashion of that world doth not pass away.

But to all this it may be said, you have already told us, that "the children of this world" have so many advantages above "the children of light," that it is no wonder if they excel and outstrip them: and it is very true, that in many respects they have the advantage of them. But if the children of light would look about them, and take all things into consideration, they might see something very considerable to balance the advantages on the other side. It is true, the things of this world are present and sensible; but so long as we have sufficient assurance of the reality of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments of it, the greatness and eternity of these is such an amazing consideration, that no distance can render them inconsiderable to a prudent and thinking man. And though the men of the world have an entire principle, which is not divided between God and the world; whereas, in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the flesh and spirit; yet this disadvantage is likewise balanced by that powerful assistance of God's grace, which is promised to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are sincerely resolved to make use of it. And lastly, Though the

men of the world have many ways to compass their ends, yet "the children of light" have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world use to accomplish their designs, may fail and miscarry; for "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to all:" but he that sincerely serves God, and useth the means for the attaining of everlasting salvation, is sure to attain it; if we seek the righteousness of God, as we ought, we shall certainly be admitted into his kingdom. And this surely is an unspeakable advantage, which "the children of light" have above "the children of this world," that if we faithfully use the means, we cannot fail of the end; "if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life;" which God of his infinite goodness grant to us all, for his mercy's sake!

SERMON CXXIX.

CONCERNING THE PERFECTION OF GOD.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.—MATT. v. 48.

THESE words are the conclusion which our Saviour draws from those precepts which he had given his disciples, of greater perfection, than any laws that were extant in the world before: (ver. 44.) "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you." And to persuade them hereto, he propounds to them the pattern of the Divine perfection; telling them, that being thus affected towards their enemies, they should resemble God, (ver. 45.) "That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father; for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust."

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our enemies, and those that have been injurious to us, we are so far from being like God, that we are but just level with the worst of men: (ver. 46, 47.) "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" And then concludes that if we would attain that perfection which the Christian re-

ligion designs to advance men to, we must endeavour to be like God in these perfections of goodness, and mercy, and patience; "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." In which words we have,

First, The absolute perfection of the Divine nature supposed: "As your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Secondly, It is propounded as a pattern to our imitation: "Be ye therefore perfect," &c.

In handling of these words I shall do these four things:

I. Consider how we are to conceive of the Divine perfection.

II. I shall lay down some rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God.

III. How far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those Divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. I shall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us; and then conclude this discourse with some useful inferences from the whole.

I. I shall consider how we are to conceive of the Divine perfection, these two ways:

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible perfection to God.

2. By separating and removing all manner of imperfection from him.

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible perfection to God; absolute and universal perfection, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particu-

lars; but whatever we can conceive and imagine to be a perfection, is to be ascribed to him; yea, and beyond this, whatever possible perfection there is, or possible degree of any perfection, which our short understandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be ascribed to him. For we are not to confine the perfection of God to our imagination, as if we could "find out the Almighty to perfection:" but, on the contrary, to believe the perfection of the Divine nature to be boundless and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our highest thoughts and apprehensions.

More particularly, all kinds and all degrees of perfection are to be ascribed to God, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue some imperfection, or are not evidently inconsistent with some other and greater perfection.

Some things may seem to be perfections, which in truth are not, because they are plainly impossible, and involve a contradiction: as, that what has once been, should by any power be made not to have been; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confined to one place, should at the same time be in another. These things in reason are impossible, and therefore not to be supposed to fall under any power, how unlimited soever. For if we once ascribe contradictions to God, we destroy his being; because then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are some perfections, which do argue and suppose imperfections in them; as motion, the quickness and swiftness whereof in creatures is a perfection, but then it supposeth a finite and limited nature: for a boundless and immense Being, that is every where present at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and there-

fore, though motion be a perfection in creatures, there is no reason to ascribe it to God, because it supposeth a greater imperfection.

And there are also some imaginable degrees of perfection, which, because they are inconsistent with other perfections, are not to be admitted in the Divine nature. For instance, such degrees of goodness and mercy may be imagined, as would quite exclude and shut out justice; and, on the other hand, such a strictness and a rigour of justice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy; and therefore such degrees are not really to be esteemed perfections. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a Divine perfection, which evidently clasheth with any other necessary and essential perfection of the Divine nature. We must so consider the perfections of God, that they may accord and consist together; and therefore it cannot be a perfection of God to be so good and gracious as to encourage sin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws and government. It is not goodness, but easiness and weakness, to be contented to be perpetually injured and affronted. It is not patience to be willing to be everlastingly trampled upon. So likewise, on the other hand, it is not a perfection to be so severe and rigorous, as to smite a sinner in the instant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from punishment, and to give time for repentance.

But whatever perfection is conceivable or possible, and argues no imperfection, nor is repugnant to any other necessary perfection, is to be ascribed to God; for this is the most natural and easy conception that we can have of God, that he is the most perfect being. This natural light doth first suggest and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of God as

mere power and will, without wisdom and goodness. Hence it is that the Greeks call God very often τὸ Κρεῖττον, *the best of beings:* and the Latins, *optimus maximus*, "the best and the greatest," *beatissima et perfectissima natura constans, et perfecta ratio*, "the happiest and most perfect nature, immutable and absolute reason;" and many other such expressions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen philosophers. I readily grant, that the first and most obvious thought which men have of God, is that of his greatness and majesty; but this necessarily involves or infers his goodness; as Seneca excellently reasons, *Primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas;* "The first worship of the gods is to believe their being, next to ascribe to them greatness and majesty, to ascribe to them goodness, without which there can be no majesty."

And we shall find all along in Plato and Tully, and the best and wisest writers among the heathens, that they every where attribute the highest excellences and perfections to the Divine nature, and do steer and govern all their discourses of God by this principle, that perfection is to be ascribed to him: and whenever any thing is said of God, they examine whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aside, as a thing not fit to be spoken of him.

And in the Scripture we do every where find perfection ascribed to the nature, and works, and laws of God, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him. (Job xxxvii. 16.) "Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?" And again, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty

to perfection?" (Psal. xviii. 30.) "As for God, his way is perfect." (Psal. xix. 7.) "The law of the Lord is perfect."

I shall not need to consider particularly the several perfections of the Divine nature; I shall only give you a brief scheme and draught of them. Whatever perfection can be imagined either in the manner of being or acting, is to be ascribed to God; therefore, as to his nature, we say that he is a spirit; that is, that he is not mere body or matter, because that would exclude several other perfections; for mere matter is incapable both of knowledge and liberty, being determined by necessary laws and motions; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wisdom nor goodness. We say of God, that he is of himself, and without cause, and does not owe his being to any other; and consequently, that he is necessarily, and that he cannot but be, and cannot be otherwise than he is; for that which is of itself did not choose whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwise; for to suppose any thing to deliberate or consult about its own being, is to suppose it to be before it is.

We must say of God, likewise, that he is immense, and every where present, because to be limited is an imperfection; and that he is eternal; that is, ever was, and shall be; for to cease to be, is a greater imperfection than sometime not to have been.

And then we are to say of God, that he is the cause of all other beings; that they are made by him, and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the most perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the mere beck and nod of his will, without long study or deliberation,

without laborious pains and endeavours, and consequently, that nothing is exempted from his knowledge, and power, and providence, and that he administers all things in a way of goodness and wisdom, of justice and truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their last end. All these perfections, and all other that are possible, we are to look upon the Divine nature as fully and immutably possessed of, and that in a higher and more excellent degree than our finite understandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to ascribe all imaginable and possible perfections to God, so we are to separate and remove all manner of imperfection from him. We must not obscure or blemish the Divine nature with the least shadow or blot of imperfection. If we once admit of this, to ascribe any thing to God which argues imperfection, we strike at the foundation, and destroy one of the clearest and most essential notions which men have of God. And therefore we find the Scripture very careful to remove all kinds of natural or moral imperfection from God. (Gen. xviii. 25.) "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous shall be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the world do right?" (Deut. xxxii. 4.) "A God of truth, and without iniquity." (Rom. ix. 14.) "What shall we say then, is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid," far be it from him.

Hence it is that Scripture holiness is so frequently ascribed to God, which signifies the purity and freedom of the Divine nature from that which we call sin; and God is very solicitous to give us such a

notion of himself, as may remove sin and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from him, because that is the greatest of imperfections. Is it an imperfection to countenance sin? the Scripture acquits God of it: (Psal. v. 4, 5.) "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee." Is it an imperfection to go from one's word, or to change one's mind? this, likewise, is removed from God: (1 Sam. xv. 29.) "The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: he is not a man, that he should repent." Is it an imperfection to want any thing, to be liable to any thing, to depend upon any thing without one's self for their happiness? this also is to be set far from him. (Job xxii. 2, 3.) "Can a man be profitable to God? or is it a gain to him, that thou makest thy way perfect?" (Job xxxv. 6, 7.) "If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? if thou art righteous, what givest thou him, or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." Is it an imperfection to tempt, or to be tempted to sin? this is to be separated from God: "He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man," saith St. James, (chap. i. 17.) And, to mention no more, is it an imperfection to be in any respect mutable? this is denied of God: "With him there is no variableness, or shadow of turning." Thus you see how we are to conceive of the perfections of God, by ascribing all imaginable and possible perfection to him, and removing all shadow of imperfection from him. I proceed, in the

II. Second place, To lay down some rules by which we may rectify and govern our opinions con-

cerning the attributes and perfections of God: the best I can think of are these following:

First, Let us begin with the most natural, and plain, and easy perfections of God, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehensions of God, and reasonings about him, by these; and these are his power, wisdom, and goodness, to which most of the rest may be reduced. Right apprehensions, and a firm belief of these, will make it easily credible to us, that all things were made, and are governed by him; for his goodness will dispose and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. An infinite power and wisdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any disturbance of his ease or happiness, as Epicurus would seem vainly to fear; who, in truth, did not believe a God, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or governed the world, because he was loath to lay so much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if those things which are impossible and difficult to our weakness and folly, might not be infinitely easy to infinite power and wisdom.

Particularly the goodness and justice of God are not so difficult to apprehend, as the disputes and controversies about them have rendered them to many. When we consider infinite knowledge and power, we may easily lose ourselves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them: there is something concerning these, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reason; we may not be able to understand how something may be produced from nothing, because it argues such an excess of power, as we cannot comprehend; but yet we are

forced to acknowledge, that either the world must be produced from nothing, or that matter was eternally of itself, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power should be able to produce it from nothing. So likewise we are not able to conceive, how God can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain causes, because we cannot comprehend infinite knowledge; but this we may easily be satisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great mathematician can demonstrate his propositions. Only this we are sure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that which is evidently impossible, and implies a plain contradiction.

We are not able, perhaps, to reconcile the particular providences of God with his universal goodness, justice, and wisdom, because we cannot see to the end of his ways and works at one view, and see every part with relation to the whole; which would appear very wise, if we knew the whole series of things, and saw the entire design together, as God himself does, to whom (as Solomon tells us) "all his ways are known from the beginning."

So that however we may be at a loss in our conceptions of God's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodness, and justice, and truth, are notions easy and familiar; and, if we could not understand these, the whole Bible would be insignificant to us. For all revelation from God supposeth us to know what is meant by goodness, justice, and truth; and therefore no man can entertain any notion of God, which plainly contradicts these. And it is foolish for any

man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodness, and justice, and truth in God are; for if we do not know this, it is all one to us whether God be good or not, nor could we imitate his goodness; for he that imitates endeavours to make himself like something that he knows, and must, of necessity, have some idea of that to which he aims to be like: so that if we had no certain and settled notion of the goodness, and justice, and truth of God, he would be altogether an unintelligible being; and religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be utterly impossible.

Now these being the most easy and intelligible perfections of God, by which he is said in Scripture to declare his name, that is, to make himself known to us, we should govern all our reasonings about God (as, concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark and obscure) by what is more clear; and we shall find in Scripture, that in all these points holy men do constantly appeal to these unquestionable and intelligible perfections of God. "Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? (saith Abraham.) that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the world do right?" We may be mistaken, but God certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to punish the wicked, and save the righteous: but we cannot be mistaken in this principle, that the Judge of all the world will do right. Thus Moses satisfies himself, and others, concerning the particular providences of God towards the people of Israel. (Deut. xxxii. 3, 4.) "I will publish the name of the Lord: all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without ini-

quity, just and right is he." This we certainly know of God. So St. Paul, (Rom. ii. 2.) "Thou art inexcusable, O man!" Whatsoever excuse men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, "We are sure the judgment of God is according to truth."

Secondly, Let us always consider the perfections of God in conjunction, and so as to reconcile them with one another. Do not consider God as mere power and sovereignty, as mere mercy and goodness, as mere justice and severity; but as all these together, and in such a measure and degree, as may make them consistent with one another. The greatest mistakes in religion have certainly sprung from this root, from separating the perfections of God, and considering them singly, and framing such wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another; whereas the perfections of God agree together, and that is not a Divine perfection which contradicts any other perfection. Among men, indeed, an eminent degree of any one excellency does usually shut out some other; and therefore it is observed, that power and moderation, love and discretion, do not often meet together; that a great memory and a small judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction. But in infinite perfection all perfections do eminently meet and consist together; and it is not necessary that one excellency should be raised upon the ruins of another.

And if this had been well considered, men would not, by being too intent upon God's sovereignty, with neglect of his other perfections, have spoken those hard things about predestination; for the sovereignty of God doth by no means set him above the

eternal laws of goodness, and truth, and righteousness. And if this were considered, men would not, by poring upon the justice and severity of God, be so swallowed up in despair; for God is not so severe, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning sinner. If this were well considered, it would check the presumption of those who encourage themselves in sin, by fancying to themselves a God of all mercy and goodness; and "because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore their heart is fully set in them to do evil;" for it is not goodness and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obstinate offenders, but want of prudence and good government.

Thirdly, Among different opinions concerning God (as there always have been and will be in the world) choose those which are farthest from extremity; because truth as well as virtue usually lies between the extremes. And here I will instance in that controversy, which has much disquieted the church almost in all ages, concerning the decrees of God; about which there are two extremes; the one, that God peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular person, that is, their everlasting happiness or misery, without any regard or consideration of the good or bad actions of men: the other, that God decrees nothing concerning any particular person, but only in general, that men found under such and such qualifications shall be happy or miserable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themselves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man must be that understands the difficulties on both sides, had best take up in the middle opinion, that God decrees the final condition of particular persons with respect to certain qualifi-

cations, which, speaking absolutely, are not in every man's power, but yet, under the influence of God's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, may be said to be in our power, in the same sense as St. Paul says, "I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me:" for besides that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it—that he that stands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the dissenters on both sides, than either of them will be to one another: because the middle is not so far from either extreme, as the extremes are from one another; at the worst, he stands fairest for an impartial inquiry after truth, and when he has satisfied himself where the truth lies, he may more silently pass over to it, without any great imputation of inconsistency; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who passeth from one extreme to another.

Fourthly, and lastly, Entertain no opinion concerning God, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion, and a good life, though never so specious and subtle arguments may be used to persuade it. Truth is most easily seen and discerned in those reasonings and opinions which tend to practice; because the absurdity and inconvenience of them is soonest discovered; whereas we cannot so certainly find out the truth or falsehood of those opinions, which speculative men devise in their studies, without any consideration whether they serve any real purpose of life or not. Men, indeed, are very apt to form those notions, which are most remote from common sense and use; because more pains and wit are required to make them plausible; but there needs no other argument to make a wise man despise them, than that they are unprofitable, and sig-

nify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

This is universally true in all kind of knowledge, but most considerable in the knowledge of God and religion; because that knowledge is of the greatest consideration. We need not scruple to admit some things, not so evident to natural reason, if we be satisfied of the truth of them from a higher and more cogent reason: as, that God has revealed it, and said it; this general reason may persuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reason: but we may not admit any thing for a Divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of a holy life; because this is the main end of all Divine revelation; and we know God, only in order to the service and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and false, because it destroys its end. There are many things that seem probable enough in speculation, which yet we most pertinaciously deny, because they are not practicable; and there are many things which seem doubtful in speculation, and would admit of great dispute, which yet, because they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unquestionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle reasoning of the Stoics was a thing contemned by the wiser philosophers, as vain and useless subtlety. Zeno pretends to demonstrate there is no motion; and what is the consequence of this speculation, but that men must stand still? but so long as a man finds he can walk, all the sophistry in the world will not persuade him that motion is impossible. In like manner, they that would persuade us that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own sanctification than

stocks or stones, and upon scripture-metaphors misunderstood (as our being "dead in trespasses and sins," and "created to good works,") graft notions, which are impossible and absurd in practice, do not consider that the natural consequence of this is, that men must do nothing at all in religion, never think of God, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church, but sit still and be wholly passive to the operations of God's grace. But however this may seem plausible, and men may think they add much to the glory of God's grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every considerate man will presently apprehend that this is by no means to be admitted, because it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of God's word vain and to no purpose, because it destroys religion, and discourages the endeavours of men; makes them slothful and careless of working out their own salvation, than which nothing can set a man farther from God's grace and assistance, and more immediately dispose him for ruin; and upon some such false reasoning as this, the slothful servant in the parable hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth; but when he was called to account, his excuse was not admitted, but he was cast "into utter darkness." The two other particulars; namely, how far we are to imitate the Divine perfections, and particularly what those Divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation, and likewise to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here enjoined, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is not impossible to us: both these I shall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON CXXX.

CONCERNING OUR IMITATION OF THE DIVINE PERFECTIONS.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.--MATT. v. 48.

IN these words we have, First, The absolute perfection of the Divine nature supposed, not only in those beforementioned, of goodness, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellences whatsoever.

Secondly, The perfection of God is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of these two particulars I propounded to proceed in this method:

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the Divine perfection.

II. To lay down some rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those Divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us; and then to draw some useful inferences from the whole.

The two first I have already spoken to. I now proceed to the third particular, which is, To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and

particularly what those Divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute perfections of God, which are incommunicable, and a creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be supposed to be intended for a pattern to us. As, the necessity and independency of the Divine nature; and the self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the original cause of all things; and consequently, supreme Lord and Governor; the immensity and eternity of his being: these, and perhaps several other perfections, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an insufferable pride, and a kind of high treason against the Divine Majesty, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own state, as we are creatures, to think to resemble God in those excellences, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the sin of Lucifer: an ambition to step into the throne of God, and to be like the Most High.

So that, in our imitation of the Divine perfection, we are to keep within the station of creatures, not affecting an independency and sovereignty like the Most High, and to be omnipotent as he is, "to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him," as the expression is in Job; but to endeavour to resemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, according to the rate and capacity of a creature, in those Divine qualities, and in such measures and degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of.

More especially and chiefly in the moral perfections of the Divine nature, such as are his goodness, and mercy, and patience, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness; these, and only these, the Scrip-

ture seems to comprehend under the name of holiness; not all the excellences of the Divine nature in general; but those which we call moral excellences and perfections, such as those which I have named; for with these, and hardly with any other, is the holiness of God joined in Scripture, as "holy and righteous—holy and true," &c. And therefore, when God says, "Be ye holy, for I am holy;" it signifies, that we are to imitate God in his goodness, and mercy, and patience, and righteousness, and faithfulness, and truth; for these are the holiness of the Divine nature, which set him at the greatest distance from that which we call moral impurity and sin.

For that which our Saviour, here in the text, more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodness of God, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of God, is his goodness to those that are in misery, or are liable to it. The patience of God, is his mercy in sparing those who have deserved punishment, and are liable to it. And the goodness of God is then greatest, when it is exercised towards the evil and unthankful; those who are so far from deserving it, that they have given great and just provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is so remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankful sons of men, our Saviour recommends to our imitation, here in the text, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Be ye therefore——" this particle of inference, *therefore*, hath a plain relation to something spoken before; and if we look back to ver. 44. we shall find our Saviour there enjoining his disciples to "love their enemies; to bless them

that curse them; to do good to them that hate them; and to pray for those that despitefully use them, and persecute them." And by what other argument doth he enforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like God, to be good to the evil and unthankful? (ver. 45.) "That ye may be the children of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his rain to fall on the just and the unjust." God is good to all, and exerciseth great mercy and patience even towards the evil and unjust. And then he concludes, that if perfection itself be fit to be a pattern, we should labour after these qualities; "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." So that though the universal perfection of the Divine nature be here supposed, yet the attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the Divine perfection is more especially to be understood of those perfections which our Saviour had been discoursing of before; viz. the goodness and mercy of God. And that this is undoubtedly so, is evident from St. Luke's rendering this precept, (chap. vi. 36.) "Be ye therefore οἰκτίρμονες, *benefici*, ready to do good, full of kindness and benignity; merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful;" that is, endeavour you to be such as I have described God to be. And this St. Matthew calls perfection; because the goodness of God is his great perfection; and the glory of the Divine nature, that which reflects a lustre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what those perfections of the Divine na-

ture are, which our Saviour doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and last place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew, that the duty here required, and intended by our Saviour, (when he says, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,") is not impossible to us. And to this purpose, be pleased to consider these three or four things:

1. That our imitation of God is certainly restrained to the communicable perfections of God, and such as creatures are capable of; as I have shewn before. For it is so far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like God in his peculiar perfections, that it was probably the sin of the apostate angels.

2. Our imitation of the Divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewise to be restrained to such degrees of these perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be so perfectly good as God is; nor partake of any other excellency, in that transcendant degree, in which the Divine nature is possessed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of so great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excel in any kind, is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum proponere,* to propose the highest and most perfect examples to our imitation. No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Besides that, the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, so it kindles ambition, and makes men strain and contend to the utmost to do better: and though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hinderance, but an advantage rather, to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be supposed to be our duty, which is absolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reason be supposed to be so, as any thing that can be instanced in: because, in such a case, if we do our best, and be continually pressing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raise our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, such a will and endeavour will be acceptable with God for the deed. For, if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the possibility of our performance, the assurance we have of God's goodness will sufficiently secure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reasonably presume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to ourselves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readiness and cheerfulness of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do something towards it, we may be sure that he will be very well pleased when he sees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may, in this case, reason as our Saviour does; "If we that

are evil would deal thus with our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father?" The goodness of God signifies very little, if it does not signify this—that, in any instance of real and unquestionable goodness, God is much better than any father upon earth.

However, at the worst, that wherein we fall short of the perfection of the law, may be supplied, on our part, by a humble acknowledgment of our own weakness and imperfection; and on God's part, by mercy and forgiveness, for the sake of the perfect obedience of our blessed Redeemer. This is the least benefit we can expect in this case from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the gospel.

5. And lastly, Which will fully clear this matter; this precept doth not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually ascending and climbing up higher, still advancing from one degree of goodness to another, and continually aspiring after a near resemblance to God: and this certainly is possible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect state.

Whereas any equality with God, even in the communicable attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience, is not only impossible to us in this state of sin and imperfection, but above the condition of a creature, even of the spirits of just men made perfect, and of the highest angels in glory; for their perfection is not absolute, but in comparison with our present state. And, I think, there is no great reason to doubt, but that the blessed spirits above, who continually behold the face of their Father, are still writing after this copy,

which is here propounded to us; and endeavouring to be "perfect, as their Father which is in heaven is perfect;" still aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of God, whose goodness and mercy is so far beyond and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this seems to be no inconsiderable ingredient and enhancement of the happiness of heaven, that the holiness of good men (which is the similitude of God) is never at a stand, nor at its full growth and period; but that the glorified saints (yea, and blessed angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themselves still become better and happier to all eternity. And this, in my apprehension, is no undervaluing the happiness of heaven, that it is not so perfect at first, as it shall be afterwards; because it is granted, on all hands, that the happiness of those good souls, who are already in bliss, shall be more perfect and complete at the resurrection. And why may it not then be continually increasing, and be augmented still more and more, without any stint or final period of its perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long course of goodness, and to be weary of well-doing: but, in the other state, when men should be strongly biassed to goodness, and having nothing to pull them back, it will then be so far from being a trouble, that methinks it should be a mighty pleasure to the blessed, to find that there is no end of doing good and becoming better. For if conformity to God be the ground and foundation of all happiness, then our blessedness will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confess, were a dismal consideration,

to think that in heaven we should be liable to relapse, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy state. But this is a comfortable consideration, that our holiness and happiness shall never be at a stand, that it is secure so far as it goes, and that we cannot lose what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, should be a trouble to no man, that, as good and happy as he is at first, he shall still be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as God pleaseth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future state), this is certain—that an equality with God, in any of his perfections, is not to be attained by any creature; and, therefore, cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: but that which our Saviour requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the Divine perfection always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourselves to the nearest resemblance of God, that possibly we can. And if this be our sincere care and study, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with God, and that he will be graciously pleased to esteem us for his children; and, if there need a pardon for it, that God will forgive us where we fall short of the perfection of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had done all we could, we must still fall much short of the perfection of God's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near so much as we can, and is not conscious to himself that it is through his own fault and neglect that he

is so unlike his heavenly Father in goodness and mercy, in righteousness and true holiness; and that he still partakes in so great a measure of those, not only unreasonable and brutish, but even devilish passions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that these ungodlike qualities do so frequently prevail upon us, and have so much dominion over us.

We are so far from being what we ought, in these and many other respects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conscience, and make it our sincere endeavour to subdue ourselves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holiness in his fear.

Would we but often set God before our eyes, and represent to ourselves those excellent and amiable perfections of the Divine nature, which are so comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we stand so infinitely obliged, his goodness, and mercy, and patience, upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miserable past recovery; that goodness and patience which he continually exerciseth towards us (for we provoke him every day), and exerciseth towards us, on purpose to endear those perfections to us, from which we reap so much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of perfection itself, and the example of him who is so much above us, no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any interest to be concerned for us; and who, being happy in himself, neither hopes nor fears any thing from us: I say, by an example that has all these advantages, we might be provoked to be so affected towards one another (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil

one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue; and miserable creatures are we, whenever he ceaseth to be so: and we have reason to fear he will cease to be so, if this example of his goodness and patience towards us do not transform us into the image of the Divine perfections, and prevail upon us to imitate those excellences which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

These considerations, taken both from ingenuity and interest, should awaken our sloth, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that perfection which our Saviour here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is set so high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcerned about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and, at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfil this precept of our Lord, of being "perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

And yet, let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly Father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from heaven, and the temper of the blessed; so far are we utterly unqualified for the blissful sight and enjoyment of God: for unless we be first "like him," we cannot "see him as he is: "only "the pure in heart shall see God;" and therefore "every man that has this hope in him," should purify himself "even as he is pure."

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, dispatched the four things I propounded for the explication of

this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the Divine perfections, and to give some rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the possibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw some useful inferences from this discourse which I have made; and they shall be these two:

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the essential perfections of God.

II. That the truest and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of God.

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion, are grounded upon the essential perfections of God; so that even Divine revelation itself doth suppose these for its foundation, and can signify nothing to us, unless these be first known and believed. Unless we be first persuaded of the providence of God, and his particular care of mankind, why should we believe that he would make any revelation of himself to men? Unless it be naturally known to us, that God is true, what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what signifies the laws and promises of God, unless natural light do first assure us of his sovereign authority and faithfulness? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reasoning, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his essential perfection; and, consequently, if any pretend Divine revelation for this doctrine, that God hath from all eternity absolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greatest part of mankind, without any respect to the sins and demerits of men, I am as

certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am sure that God is good and just: because this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodness and justice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodness; and therefore, if an apostle or "angel from heaven" teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodness and justice of God, "let him be accursed." For every man hath greater assurance that God is good and just, than he can have of any subtle speculations about predestination and the decrees of God.

And for the same reason, I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men understand their public prayers, and the lessons of Scripture which are read to them. A lesson not to be understood, is nonsense: a lesson is something to be learned; which how it can be without being understood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any person or church whatsoever, that God should reveal his will to men in the Holy Scriptures, with a design to have it hid, and locked up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much less can I believe (which yet is the express doctrine of the council of Trent), that the saving efficacy of the sacrament depends upon the intention of the priest: which is to say, that though people believe, and live never so well, they may be damned by shoals and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of the priest; and for no other reason, but because he is so wicked as not to intend to save them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of God's goodness? May we not in

this case appeal, as Abraham did, to the goodness and justice of God, and expostulate with greater reason than he did, much after the same manner—"Wilt thou destroy the righteous for the wicked? That be far from thee to do after this manner." To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people should lie at the mercy of a wicked priest, to be damned or saved at his pleasure, "that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And can there be a greater affront to the goodness and justice of God, than to imagine he should deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one instance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man or church whatsoever, that our Saviour, in the celebration of his last supper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his disciples; and give his blood shed, before it was shed; that the whole doctrine of Christianity should mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the assurance of which depends upon the certainty of sense; and yet that an essential part of that doctrine should overthrow the certainty of sense. I can never while I live believe these two things, that the last thing our Saviour did before his death, should be to teach his disciples not to believe their own senses, as he must do if he taught them transubstantiation; and that the very first thing he did after he was risen from the dead, should be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of sense for the proof of his resurrection; for when they doubted of his resurrection, (Luke xxiv. 38.) "He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet,

that it is I myself: handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they saw, because they saw and felt flesh and bones; is it not as good an argument, on the other side, that what they saw in the sacrament was not his real and natural body, because they could neither see nor handle flesh and bones? So that I cannot believe transubstantiation, unless I can believe that truth itself can contradict and destroy itself.

You see of what use it is to have right and steady apprehensions of the Divine perfections; that, these being laid for a foundation, we may, upon all occasions, have recourse to them, and govern our opinions and reasonings in religion, about all doubtful matters, by such principles as are clear and unquestionable. The

II. Second inference is, That the truest and most substantial practice of religion consists in the imitation of the Divine perfections, especially the moral perfections of the Divine nature, which the Scripture is wont to comprehend under the name of holiness; and such are the goodness, and mercy, and patience of God, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness. To imitate God in these, is true religion; or, as St. James expresses it, "pure religion, and undefiled," ἀμίαντος, without any flaw or blemish; alluding to precious stones, the greatest commendation of which is to be clear, and without flaw. *Religio est, imitari quem colis;* "That is religion, to imitate him whom we worship." This the heathens, by the light of nature, did discover to be the great end of religion, and the best worship of the Deity, to be like God. Pythagoras was wont to say, "That we honour God most, when we are most like him in the

temper and disposition of our minds." And Plato to the same purpose, "That the height and perfection of goodness is to resemble God as near as is possible; and that we resemble God, in being just, and holy, and wise." So likewise Hierocles, "That a good man imitates God, in the measures of love and friendship, who hates no man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." Plutarch hath an excellent discourse about the patience of God towards sinners, and gives this as one reason why God doth not presently punish offenders, "That he might give an example to us of gentleness and patience, and check the fury and violence of men in revenging injuries upon one another: which nothing will do more effectually, than to consider that gentleness and forbearance are an imitation of the Divine perfection:" and then he cites an excellent saying of Plato, "That God manifested himself, and displayed his perfections in the world, for our imitation: true virtue being nothing else but an imitation of the Divine nature." For there is no greater benefit man can receive from God's hand, than to become virtuous by the imitation and pursuit of those excellences and perfections which are in God. Seneca, likewise, hath many passages to this purpose: *Inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia est, imo etiam necessitudo et similitudo;* "Between God and men there is a friendship, yea, and an intimacy and likeness:" and that a virtuous man is *discipulus æmulatorque et progenies Dei,* "a disciple and imitator, and the very genuine offspring of God." So that the light of nature and the reason of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the Divine excellences and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and

sense of the Holy Scriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to consist in our conformity to God, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing else but a transcript of his nature. The great business of religion is to do the will of God; and "this is the will of God our sanctification;" and our sanctification is our conformity to the holiness of God; and this is the scope of the general exhortations of Scripture, to persuade us to holiness; that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the Divine nature. (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God." (1 Pet. i. 15, 16.) "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy." (2 Pet. i. 3, 4.) Speaking of the Christian religion, which he calls "the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby also (says he) are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of a Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." So that the holiness the gospel designs to bring us to, is a participation of the Divine nature, which we can no otherwise partake of, but by an imitation of the Divine perfections. This is that which the Scripture expresses to us by the terms of regeneration, the new man, and the new creature. And, therefore, those who are converted from a wicked and sinful state, and reclaimed to goodness, are said to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and the holiness of truth." (Eph. iv. 23.) "To be renewed after the image of him that created us."

(Colos. iii. 10.) This is to be the sons and children of God, to imitate "and resemble God in our dispositions and manners." (Eph. v. 1.) "Be ye therefore, μιμηταὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, imitators of God, as dear children." (Phil. ii. 15.) "That ye may be blameless and sincere, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." (1 John iii. 10.) "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God." There have been great inquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and resemblance of God in those perfections, wherein he is set forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly consists the practice both of natural religion, and of true Christianity.

But does not religion consist very much in the duties of God's worship, in the exercise of piety and devotion, in constant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodness by praise and thanksgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God's word, in fasting and abstinence, and keeping our bodies in subjection to our spirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy sacrament? To this I answer, that religion doth consist very much in the due performance of these duties, and they are unquestionable and necessary parts of religion, and the means appointed by God for the begetting and increasing in us such dispositions of mind, as render us most like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness in our lives.

But then it is to be considered, that these exercises of piety and devotion are but the means of religion,

and not the ultimate end and design of it. All these do but serve to bring us to a nearer resemblance of God; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own sakes only, and we rest in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they lose their nature; because they are not used as means, but rested in, as if they were the end of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal mistake about religion, and think that if they do but serve God in their families, and go to church, and behave themselves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain seasons receive the sacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Christians; when all this while they take no care to improve themselves in real goodness, by an inward conformity of their minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives; by mortifying their lusts, and subduing their appetites and passions to the laws of reason and religion; by "putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of kindness;" by being true and faithful, righteous and just, patient and merciful, "as their Father which is in heaven is" so; and by "forbearing one another," in case of provocation, and "forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us;" by "purifying themselves as God is pure," and endeavouring to "be holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called them is holy:" when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and, to serve their covetousness, will strain a point of truth or justice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or some such urgent necessity, in point of decency and reputation, that for shame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when

their passions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterness, their tongues of slander and evil-speaking, their humours as proud, and surly, and censorious, as theirs can be who are openly profane, and seem to neglect and despise all religion: and yet, because they serve God (as they call it), and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good churchmen, and attend upon the ordinances of God, they think they have discharged the whole business of religion admirably well, and are very good "children of God," and in a state of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all these duties, and the use of all these means, separated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of ourselves to God, in those qualities and dispositions which I have mentioned, is so far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every where declares in Scripture, telling us, that "the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord;" and that he disdains to be praised by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unless with "the praises we offer to him, we order our conversation aright, we shall not see the salvation of God." With what contempt does he speak of this formal external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the fast which I have chosen, to break the bands of wickedness, and to let the oppressed go free; to

deal thy bread to the hungry; and that thou bring the poor, that are cast out, to thine house; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Nor is it "hearing of the word" that will avail us, unless "we be doers of it." "Blessed are they (says our Saviour) that hear the word of God, and keep it. He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened to a wise man, who hath built his house upon a rock." Nor will bare receiving the sacrament recommend us to God; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon ourselves, to abstain from all sin and wickedness; otherwise "we tread under foot the Son of God, and profane the blood of the covenant, whereby we should be sanctified, as if it were an unholy thing." Can any man think that to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads those plain words of St. James—"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." When religion produceth these real effects, then the means of religion do truly serve the end of it; and we are not only "hearers of the word, but doers of it, and shall be blessed in our deed."

So that, as there is an obligation upon us to use the means of religion, which God hath instituted, with great care and conscience, so we should chiefly mind that which is the end of all religion, which is to

make us " partakers of a Divine nature," and make us like to God, especially in those amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the Divine nature, his benignity and goodness, his mercy and patience. These, because they are the primary perfections of God, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indispensable obligation; because they have their foundation in the nature of God, which is fixed and unalterable: and all positive institutions, when they come in competition with these, are to stoop and veil to them. Natural and moral duties, especially those of goodness, and mercy, and charity, are so strongly bound upon us, that nothing in any revealed religion can cancel the obligation of them, or justify the violation of these great and indispensable laws. Our Saviour, in his religion, has declared nothing to the prejudice of them: but, on the contrary, has straitened our obligation to them as much as is possible: " The Son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;" so that they " know not what manner of spirit they are of," who think to please God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, and " by killing one another, to do him good service;" who, to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil society, undermine government, and disturb the peace of mankind.

Whereas our Saviour did not, by any thing in his religion, design to alter the civil government of the world, or to lessen and diminish the rights of princes, or to set men loose from allegiance to them, or to make treason and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous decrees lawful, for the propagating of his

faith. He had (as any one would imagine) as much power as the pope ; but yet he deposed no princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion : he hath assumed no such power to himself. By what authority then doth his vicar do these things ; and who gave him this authority ? Our Lord tells us plainly, his kingdom was " not of this world ;" and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this power the pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time, disturbing the peace of nations, and exercising the most barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for God and religion ; as if, because religion is so very good a thing in itself, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for its sake ; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the minds of men any reverence and esteem for religion, we must take heed how we destroy the principles of natural religion, and undermine the peace and happiness of human society, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following Divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err : for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconsistent with the essential perfections of God, and with the peace and order of the world ; " for God is not the God of confusion, but of order ;" which St. Paul appealeth to, as a princi-

ple of eternal truth, and naturally known: but they that pretend that religion prompts men to sedition and cruelty, do represent God as the God of confusion, and not of order.

Therefore, whatever men may, through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion, let us place it in that which is unquestionable, the imitation of the Divine perfections, and let us, (as the apostle exhorts) "put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, and, above all, let us put on charity, which is the very bond of perfection." The great perfection of the Divine nature, or rather the very essence of God, is love. So St. John speaks, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." And it is very remarkable, that in these very qualities of charity, and kindness, and compassion, which we peculiarly call humanity, we approach nearest to the Divinity itself, and that the contrary dispositions do transform us into wild beasts and devils.

And yet, as severely as I speak against these principles and practices, I have a hearty pity and compassion for those who are under the power of so great a delusion, and, upon a pretence of being made the only true Christians in the world, are seduced from humanity itself; and so far from being made good Christians by these principles, that they are hardly left to be "men, being blinded, and led by the blind, they fall into the ditch" of the grossest and foulest immoralities: such as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no Bible in the world.

Not but that we protestants have our faults and our follies too, and those (God knows!) too many

and too visible; we possess more truth, but there is little peace among us; and yet God is as well and as often in Scripture called "the God of peace," as "the God of truth." In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animosities, of schisms and divisions, "and the way of peace we have not known." God grant that at last "in this our day," (when it concerns us so much) we may "know the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes!"

You see in what things the practice of religion mainly consists—in our likeness to God, and resemblance of him in holiness and goodness; and without this, we are utterly incapable of happiness; we cannot see God unless we be like him. The presence of God can administer no pleasure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate sin, and delight in purity and holiness, we can have no delightful communion with the holy God; till our passions be subdued, and our souls dispossessed of those devilish and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience; and till we be endued with the spirit of universal goodness and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father: we are not qualified to dwell with God, who is love, and dwells in love. So far as we are defective in these Divine qualities and perfections, so far we fall short of the temper of happiness.

There is a direct and eternal opposition between the holy and good God, and the evil dispositions of wicked men; and till this opposition be removed, it is impossible we should find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fixed

and unchangeable; God cannot recede from his own perfection, and therefore we must quit our sins: thou canst not change God, therefore change thyself; and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the Divine nature, "with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning." God condescended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

SERMON CXXXI.

THE HAPPINESS OF GOD.

The blessed God.—1 Tim. i. 11.

The whole verse runs thus:

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

Since all men naturally desire happiness, and thirst after it, methinks we should all desire to know what it is, where it is to be found, and how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What Job says of wisdom, may be said also of happiness; "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof." He only, who is perfectly possessed of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our search after happiness, the best way will be to contemplate and consider the Divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of happiness, and the original spring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end I have pitched upon these words, wherein the apostle attributes this perfection of blessedness or happiness to God; "The blessed God."

And though this be as essential a part as any other of that notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I no where find in all the New Testament, this attribute of happiness given to God, but only twice in this Epistle. It is

true, indeed, the title of blessedness is frequently given both to God and Christ, but in another sense and in a quite different notion: as (Mark xiv. 61.) where the high-priest asks our Saviour, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ, of him that is to be celebrated and praised. (2 Cor. xi. 31.) "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for evermore." So likewise, (Rom. i. 25.) "The Creator blessed for evermore:" which likewise is said of Christ, (Rom. ix. 5.) "Of whom Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore;" that is, for ever to be praised and celebrated. But in all these texts the Greek word is εὐλογητὸς, which though we translate *blessed*, yet it is a quite different notion from the title of blessedness, which is given to God in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητὸς but μακάριος, "the blessed (or happy) God;" and this title is not any where in all the New Testament (that I know of) given to God, but here in the text, and chap. vi. ver. 15. where our Lord Jesus Christ (who also is God) is called "the blessed and the only Potentate." And whether this title of "the blessed (or the happy) God," be here in the text given to God the Father, or to his eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is not so much material to my present purpose to inquire. For, suppose it be Christ who is here called "the blessed God;" this however is certain, that blessedness or happiness is a title belonging to God, which is all that is necessary for a foundation of my present discourse.

In speaking of this argument, I shall do these three things:

I. Shew what we are to understand by the happiness of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to God, and that the Divine nature is perfectly blessed and happy.

III. How far creatures are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: and shall then make some inferences from my discourse upon this argument.

I. I will consider what we are to understand by the blessedness or happiness of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it. Now the notion of happiness, taken at its highest pitch (as we must necessarily do when we apply it to God) is no other than a fixed and immoveable state of contentment and satisfaction, of pleasure and delight, resulting from the secure possession and enjoyment of all that is good and desirable; that is, of all excellency and perfection; so that these following ingredients must go to make up a perfect state of happiness.

1. Perfect knowledge, to understand what it is that constitutes happiness, and to know when one is really possessed of it. For as he is not happy, who is so only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleased with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: so, on the other hand, he that has all other necessary ingredients of happiness, and only wants this, that he doth not think himself so, cannot be happy. For this we often see in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumstances of a worldly happiness about them; yet, by the unskilful management of the matter, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make a hard shift, even when they are in as good circumstances as it is almost possible for men to be in this world, to be very discontented

and miserable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes happiness, and that he is possessed of it.

2. To perfect happiness is likewise required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happiness, and likewise to check and control whatever would be a hinderance and disturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-sufficient, and hath not within its power and reach whatever is necessary to a happy condition, and necessary to secure and continue that happiness against all attempts and accidents whatsoever.

3. There is wisdom also required to direct this power, and manage it in such a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different from mere power abstractedly considered; for one may have all the materials of happiness, and yet want the wisdom and skill to put them so together, as to frame a happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly understand the proper method and means of compassing and securing his own happiness.

4. Another most considerable and essential ingredient of happiness is goodness; without which, as there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither can there be any felicity or happiness. Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to communicate and diffuse itself, by making others partakers of its happiness, in such degrees as they are capable of it, and as wisdom shall direct: for he is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the pleasure of making others so, and of seeing them put into a happy condition by his means, which is the highest pleasure (I had almost said pride, but I may truly say glory) of a good and great mind: for by

such communications of himself, an immense and all-sufficient Being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himself; and does, as I may say, give great ease and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the least diminution of his power and happiness. For the Cause and Original of all other beings can make nothing so independent upon itself, as not still to maintain his interest in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel against his Maker, without extreme hazard to himself.

5. Perfect happiness doth imply the exercise of all other virtues, which are suitable to so perfect a Being, upon all proper and fitting occasions; that is, that so perfect a Being do nothing that is contrary to or unbecoming his holiness and righteousness, his truth and faithfulness, which are essential to a perfect Being; and for such a Being to act contrary to them in any case, would be to create disquiet and disturbance to itself: for this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctancy and displeasure, which in moral agents is that which we call guilt; for guilt is nothing else but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in one's mind, from the consciousness of having done something which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being; that is, something that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befal so perfect and immutable a being as God is.

6. Perfect happiness implies in it the settled and secure possession of all those excellences and perfections; for if any of these were liable to fail, or be

diminished, so much would be taken off from perfect and complete happiness. If the Deity were subject to any change or impairment of his condition, so that either his knowledge, or power, or wisdom, or goodness, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of happiness. And from all these does result, in the

7th, and last place, Infinite contentment and satisfaction, pleasure and delight, which is the very essence of happiness.

1. Infinite contentment and satisfaction in this condition. And well may happiness be contented with itself; that is, with such a condition, that he that is possessed of it, can neither desire it should be better, nor have any cause to fear it should be worse.

2. Pleasure and delight, which is something more than contentment: for one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleasure and delight. "No affliction is joyous for the present, but grievous," as the apostle speaks, (Heb. xii.) But there cannot be perfect happiness without pleasure in our condition. Full pleasure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expressed in words, but certainly known by inward sense and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to describe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expressions of God, the happiness of the Divine nature, and wherein it consists. I proceed to the

II. Second thing I proposed, which was to shew, That this attribute of perfection doth belong to God, and that the Divine nature is perfectly blessed, and happy; and this is so universal an acknowledgment

of natural light, that it would be a very superfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpose; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity, *beatissimam et perfectissimam naturam*, "the most happy and most perfect Being," and therefore happy, because felicity doth naturally result from perfection. It shall suffice to take notice of these two things out of heathen writers, to my present purpose:

1. That they accounted happiness so essential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to consider, what things are consistent with happiness, or inconsistent with it; and whatever did signify happiness, and was a perfection consistent with it, they ascribed to God, as a suitable property of the Divine nature; and whatever was otherwise, they removed it from God, as unfit to be said of him.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philosophers concerning the perfections of the Divine nature, they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it; even Epicurus himself, who so boldly attempted to strip the Divine nature of most of its perfections, by denying that God either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the first cause and original of all things, and his goodness likewise, and wisdom, and power, and justice, or, at least, made all these useless, by taking away all occasion and opportunity for the exercise of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profess to believe, the happiness of the Divine nature; and then, out of an ignorant and officious kindness to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the security

of his felicity, did, in effect, take away his other perfections; he would, by no means, put God to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, lest this should discompose the Deity, or be an interruption or disturbance of his ease and felicity. For thus Lucretius, the great disciple of Epicurus, describes his opinion of the Divine nature:—

Omnis enim divum, per se, natura necesse est,
Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur,
Semota a nostris rebus, sejunctaque longe.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
Nec bene pro meritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.

That is, "It is necessary that the Divine nature should be happy, and therefore altogether unconcerned in our affairs; free from all grief and danger, sufficient for itself, and standing in need of nobody, neither pleased with our good actions, nor provoked by our faults." This was a very false notion both of God and happiness, to imagine that the care of the world should be a pain and disturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness. But this is not now my business to consider; that which is to my present purpose is, that the happiness of the Divine nature was universally owned; and that blessedness is so inseparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever professes to believe a God must acknowledge him to be perfectly happy.

As for the testimony of Scripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of ὁμακάριος, "the happy," or "blessed," is given to God; but, by consequence, the Scripture every where declares the happiness of the Divine

nature; viz. wherever it speaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wisdom, and goodness, and righteousness, and of the eternity and unchangeableness of these, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of these perfections. I shall now proceed to the

III. Third and last thing which I proposed to consider; viz. How far creatures are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of absolute and perfect happiness, because that results from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in God: it remains, then, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the resemblance of God, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeness to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are creatures of a finite power, and limited understandings, and a mutable nature, we do necessarily want many of those perfections, which are the cause and ingredients of a perfect happiness. We are far from being sufficient for our own happiness; we are neither so of ourselves, nor can we make ourselves so by our own power; for neither are we wise enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own satisfaction. All the happiness that we are capable of is, by communication from Him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made "partakers of the Divine nature," (as St. Peter speaks) by our resemblance of God in those perfections, which are the most essential ingredients of happiness, his goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and holiness; these do immediately

qualify us for the favour and friendship of Almighty God, and for the blessed sight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendship and good-will to us, supplies all defects of power and wisdom in us; for, God being our friend, we have an interest in all his perfections, and a security that, as occasion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; so that though we are "weak in ourselves," we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," and are "able to do all things through him strengthening us;" and though "we want wisdom," we may have free recourse to the fountain of it, and "ask of God, who gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not." And it is next to having these perfections in ourselves, to know where to have them for asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our happiness.

So that, though our happiness depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify ourselves for it (and God is always ready to assist us by his grace to this purpose), it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as safe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were sufficient for ourselves. However, this is the highest happiness that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects supplied in so liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourse to the fountain of happiness, and at last to be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of Him, "in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore." I have done with the three things I proposed to speak to.

But to what purpose, may some say, is this long description and discourse of happiness? How are we the wiser and the better for it? I answer, very much, in several respects.

1. This plainly shews us that atheism is a very melancholy and mischievous thing; it would take away the fountain of happiness, and the only perfect pattern of it; it endeavours at once to extinguish the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, so that we could neither form any idea of happiness, or be in any possibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not sufficient for it of ourselves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us so. God is "the true light of the world," and a thousand times more necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind than the sun itself, which is but a dark shadow of that infinitely more bright and glorious Being; "the happy and only Potentate (as the apostle describes him in the latter end of this Epistle), who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see," meaning in this mortal state.

So that the greatest enemies, and most injurious of all others to mankind, are those who would banish the belief of a God out of the world; because this is to "lay the axe to the root of the tree," and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happiness from mankind. So that he is a fool, indeed, that "says in his heart, There is no God;" that is, that wisheth there were none; because it is not possible for a man to wish worse to himself, and more effectually to destroy his own happiness.

2. If the Divine nature be so infinitely and completely happy, this is a very great confirmation of

our faith and hope concerning the happiness of another life, which the Scripture describes to us, by the sight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happiness that is absolutely and infinitely perfect; because our nature is but finite and limited; but "the blessed God," who is infinitely happy himself, can also make us happy according to our finite measure and capacity. For as he that is the first and original Being can communicate being to other things, so he that is the fountain of happiness, can derive and convey happiness to his creatures.

And we shall the more easily believe this, when we consider that goodness, as it is the prime perfection, so is it likewise the chief felicity of the Divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himself, and shed abroad his goodness; and the highest expression of the Divine goodness is to communicate happiness to his creatures, and to be willing that they should share and partake with him in it. Base and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themselves, and are loath that others should take part with them: but the most noble and most generous minds are most free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themselves unless they find or make others so.

This is the highest pitch of goodness, and consequently the highest contentment, and the supreme delight of the Divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be most frequent and abundant in those acts in which it finds the greatest pleasure; to be good, and to do good, is the supreme felicity of God himself; therefore we may easily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy

by all the ways that are agreeable to his wisdom and righteousness; and that he is also willing to make us abundantly so, and to advance us to the highest degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render ourselves incapable of such a blessing, by an obstinate refusal of it, and utter indisposition for it.

This, I say, is very credible, because the happiness of God himself consists in that propension and disposition of nature, which tends to make others happy. And if there can be any accession to that which is infinite, God himself finds a new pleasure and felicity in the communication of his goodness to his creatures; and therefore is represented in Scripture as glad of the conversion of a sinner, because the sinner hereby becomes capable of the happiness which God designed for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, bestow it upon them.

There are two things which raise our hopes and expectation of good from any person, if he be able and willing to bestow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer happiness upon us, it is he who is infinitely possessed of it, and hath all the treasures of it in himself, and that God only is, who as he is able, so he is willing to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happiness to make others happy, for even that goodness which inclines him to communicate happiness to others, is a great part of his own felicity; so that, as our Saviour argues, "because I live, you shall live also," we may reason in like manner, that because God is happy, we shall be happy also; if we do but sincerely desire and

endeavour to qualify ourselves for it. The goodness of God does strongly incline him to desire our happiness, and makes him willing and ready to bestow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the goodness of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a blessed immortality. It is the happiness of the Divine nature to communicate himself; and the communications of God's goodness to us are the cause of our happiness; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodness of God ought always to be represented to the greatest advantage, and we should endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief and persuasion of it, and to remove from the Divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodness than is to be found in any of the sons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vindicate God from all suspicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men should be averse from these so agreeable and delightful apprehensions of God; or how it should be any man's interest to lessen the goodness of God: for most certainly the better God is in himself, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been said concerning the happiness of the Divine nature, we may learn wherein our happiness must consist; namely, in the image and in the favour of God: in the favour of God, as the cause of our happiness; and in the image of God, as a necessary inward disposition and qualification for it. Unless God love us, we cannot be happy; for miserable are they whom he hates: for

God to say of any man, that his "soul hath no pleasure in him," imports as great misery, and as dreadful a curse, as can be imagined, and his soul can have no pleasure in a bad man; "for he loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity: he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the wicked shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." Nay, if we could suppose that he could love and take pleasure in any person that is unlike to him (which is impossible), yet that person could not be happy, because he would want that inward frame and disposition of mind, which is necessary to happiness; for the very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God, must, in an inferior degree, be found in us, otherwise we cannot be happy; no, though a man were in heaven, if he be still a bad man, *Cœlum, non animum mutavit;* he hath only changed the climate, and is gone into another country, but he bears himself still about him, and his mind is not changed; which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than any place or outward circumstance whatsoever. A bad man, wheresoever he goes, hath a root of gall and bitterness within him, and is miserable from himself; he hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conscience.

For there is a certain temper and disposition of mind that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness and goodness, which is the nature of God; and so much as any person departs from this temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from happiness: and as sin is a departure from God, so the punishment of it is likewise expressed by departing from him; "Depart from

me, ye cursed; depart from me, all ye that work iniquity, I know you not."

And this is one great part of the misery of those degenerate and accursed spirits, the devils, who are for ever banished from the presence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, mischievous and cruel; and such a temper is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil disposition of our minds; and till this be cured, and set right, it is as impossible for any of us to be happy, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease. And the external presence of God and a local heaven (if we could imagine such a person to be admitted into it, and see all the glories of that place, and the pleasures and delights of that state); all this, I say, would signify no more to make a bad man happy, than heaps of gold and diamonds, and concerts of the most delicious music, and a well-spread table, and a rich and costly bed, would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone; because the man hath that within which torments him, and till that be removed he cannot possibly be at ease. The man's spirit is out of order, and off the hinges, and tossed from its centre; and till that be set right, and restored to its proper place and state by goodness and holiness, the man will be perpetually restless, and cannot possibly have any ease or peace in his mind: for how can there be peace, how can there be happiness to him, who is of a temper directly opposite to it? "The wicked," saith the prophet, (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) "is like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." So long as there is impurity in

our hearts, and guilt upon our consciences, they will be restlessly working: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The Hebrew word which we translate *peace*, signifies all kind of happiness; there can be no felicity to a bad man. The consideration whereof should put us upon the most serious and earnest endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The Divine nature is the only perfect idea of happiness, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy.

I have been so long upon this argument, on purpose to convince men of the necessity of holiness and goodness, and all other virtues, to our present and future happiness. They understand not the nature of happiness, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it, in any other way. The Author and the Fountain of happiness, he that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot make us so in any other way, than by planting in us such a disposition of mind, as is in truth a participation of the Divine nature, and by endowing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. There is no way to partake of the felicity of God, blessed for ever, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful, as he is.

All men naturally desire happiness, and seek after it, and are, as they think, travelling towards it, but generally they mistake their way. Many are eager in the pursuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleasures, and riches, and honour, as if these could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and shadows, and that there is no real and substantial felicity in them. "Many say, Who will

shew us any good?" meaning the good things of this world, corn, and wine, and oil: but wouldest thou be happy indeed, endeavour to be like the Pattern of happiness, and the Fountain of it; address thyself to him in the prayer of the Psalmist, "Lord, lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance, and that shalt put more joy and gladness into my heart," than the men of the world can have, "when their corn and their wine increaseth."

Many say, "Lo here!" and "Lo there!" that happiness is in a great place, or in a plentiful estate, or in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and delights; but "believe them not;" happiness is something that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is "within thee, in thine heart," and in the very inward frame and disposition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we must be like "the blessed God," we must be holy, and merciful, and good, and just, as he is, and then we are secure of his favour; for "the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright." Then we shall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleasure in communion with him, because we shall be like him. For the surest foundation of love and friendship, is a similitude of temper and disposition; every thing naturally affects its own likeness, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it, and gladly runs into the embraces of it. God and man must be like one another, before they can take pleasure in one another; if we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing impossible that we should be happy in one another, and therefore there must be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeness. The nature of God

is inflexible, fixed, and unchangeable; therefore change thyself, sinner, and endeavour to be like God; for since he cannot depart from his holiness and purity, thou must leave thy sins, and "be holy as he is holy," if ever thou hopest to be happy, as he is; "Every man that hath this hope in him," must "purify himself, even as he is pure."

Now to this "happy and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, and dwelleth in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to him be honour and power everlasting.—Amen."

SERMON CXXXII.

THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF GOD.

With whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. —JAMES i. 17.

The whole period runs thus:

Do not err, my beloved brethren: every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

THE connexion and dependance of these words upon the former is briefly this: the apostle had asserted before, that God is not the author of sin and evil; (ver. 13, 14.) "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God is not tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." And here in the text he asserts, that God is the fountain and author of all good; "Do not err, my beloved brethren;" as if he had said, Do not mistake me, though sin and evil be not from God, but from ourselves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from God, and not from ourselves; though we be the authors of the sins we commit, yet we are not so of the good that we do, that is from God; "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from ourselves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourselves,

but from God; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of ourselves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the fountain of goodness and perfection, and can never be otherwise, and can never change nor cease to be so, for "with him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning."

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift;" all that goodness, and all those degrees of perfection which are in the creatures, in the highest angels or saints, in the best of the sons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodness or happiness, in any of them, "is from above;" that is, from heaven; it is the gift of God, and cometh down from that perfect, good, and glorious Being, whom the apostle here calls "the Father of lights;" in allusion to the sun, which is a kind of universal benefactor to the world, and liberally dispenseth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below; but then there is this difference—the sun changeth its habitudes and positions in reference to us, and varies its shadows; it rises and sets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwise with this intellectual and immaterial sun, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning;" παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα, which are all astronomical words; the first, παραλλαγὴ, signifies the various habitudes and positions wherein the sun appears to us every day, at its rising, in the meridian, and when it sets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly course of the sun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or southern tropics; and hence it is that it casts several shadows to people in several

countries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκίασμα, "casting of shadows," being joined with τροπὴ, signifies, the variation of the shadows according to the course and motion of the sun.

But God is an eternal spring of light, which never riseth or sets, which hath no mixture of shadow nor darkness, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the same free and liberal dispenser of good things to his creatures; "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning;" which words signify, the immutable perfection and goodness of the Divine nature; which shall (by God's assistance) be the subject of my present discourse; in which I shall proceed in this method:

1st, I shall briefly explain what is meant by the immutability or unchangeableness of the Divine nature.

2dly, I shall shew that this is a perfection essential to God, to be immutably what he is; that is, good and perfect.

3dly, I shall answer an objection which lies against it, from the mention so often made in Scripture of God's repenting himself. And,

4thly, Apply the consideration of it to ourselves.

I. For the explication of it. By the immutability of God, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be, the same; that he undergoes no changes either of his essence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the unchangeableness of his being, he is said to be "eternal, incorruptible, and only to have immortality." In reference to his perfections, he is always the same infinitely wise, and good, and powerful, and holy, and just being; from whence it follows, that he is constant and immutable in all his decrees

and councils, his purposes and promises. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all those qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purposes, resolutions, and actions; we are continually growing or decreasing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; sometimes wise, and oftener foolish, stronger and weaker, better or worse, as it happens, and as we order ourselves, continually waxing or waning in our knowledge and wisdom, and goodness and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purposes, and break our promises, and contradict our firmest and most serious resolutions, and speak a thing and do it not, say it, and do not bring it to pass: but God is everlastingly the same in all his perfections, constant to his intentions, steady to his purposes, immutably fixed and persevering in all his decrees and resolutions. I proceed to the

II. Second thing I proposed; namely, To shew that this perfection is essential to God, to be unchangeably what he is. And this I shall endeavour to make manifest both from natural reason, and from the Divine revelation of the Holy Scriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reason; which tells us, that nothing argues greater weakness and imperfection than inconstancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one state; this is the vanity of the world in general, that "the fashion of it passeth away;" and of man in particular, that he is liable to so many natural changes, by age, and diseases, and death; for which reason he

is said by the Psalmist to be, "in his best estate, altogether vanity;" and that he is liable to so many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his understanding, and to alter his opinion so often, to be so fickle in his will, and to change so often his purposes and resolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconstancy to persons of the weakest age and understanding; as children, who are liable to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind," as the apostle speaks, (Eph. iv. 14.)

Now if the Divine nature were subject to change, this would cast an universal cloud upon all the Divine perfections, and obscure all other excellences, and make them "like the flower of the field," which, how gay and glorious soever, is fading and perishing; and the greater the Divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be; for, as the corruption of the best things is the worst, so the better any thing is, so much the worse it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And, as mutability in God would darken all his other perfections, so would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and esteem of God, would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or esteem for a being that is fickle and inconstant; if his power and justice were uncertain, his threatenings would, in a great measure, lose their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulness could fail, no promises and declarations, how gracious soever, would be any security or firm ground of trust and confidence.

And this reasoning is not the result of Divine revelation, but clearly founded in the natural notions

and suggestions of our minds; as will appear by citing one or two testimonies to this purpose, of those who had no other guide but natural light. Plato, in his Phædo, inquires, "Whether the Most Perfect (that is, God) be always the same, or sometimes thus, and sometimes otherwise? that is (saith he), whether that which is equality, and goodness, and bounty itself, receives any the least change at any time, and be not constant and uniform, and of itself always the same, Καὶ οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἀλλοίωσιν οὐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται, and is never, in any wise, upon any account, subject to any change or alteration whatsoever?" To which he answers, "That it is necessary that he should be the same always alike." And (lib. 2. de Repub.) where he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of religion, he mentions these two (which, one would almost think, he borrowed from St. James, but that he lived so long before him); viz. First, "That God is the cause of all good, and in no wise of any evil;" answerably to what our apostle here asserts, that "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that every good and perfect gift is from him." Secondly, "That God doth not deceive us, by making various representations of himself to us; sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another; for he is unchangeable, and always the same, and cannot, τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν, pass out of his own idea, or be any other than what he is." Which he further confirms by this excellent reasoning: "That which is the best and most perfect being, is not liable to any alteration; but such a being is God, and therefore he cannot be changed by any thing that is weaker and less perfect than himself, and he cannot will to change himself; for, if he should, it

must either be for the better, or for the worse: it cannot be for the better; for, being already possessed of all perfection, there can be no accession of any to him by any change; and certainly there is no wise being, as God is, that will change for the worse;" and therefore he concludes, Κάλλιστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δυνατὸν μένει ἀεὶ ἁπλῶς, καὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ μορφῇ, "That being the goodliest and best being that is possible, he always continues simply the same." Seneca likewise, speaking of the immutability of God's counsels, (lib. 6. Benef.) *Statuerunt* (says he) *quæ non mutarint, neque unquam primi concilii deos pœnitet;* "The gods make unchangeable decrees, and never repent them of their first counsel."

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the Divine revelation of the Holy Scriptures, which tell us, that God is unchangeable in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purposes, and promises; in his essence and being: (Exod. iii. 14.) "I am that I am;" this is his name, whereby he made known himself to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the Egyptians, their oppressors: (Psal. xc. 2.) "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." (Psal. cii. 27.) "Thou art the same, and thy years fail not." (Mal. iii. 6.) "I am the Lord, and change not." Hence it is, that the title of "the living God" is so frequently attributed to him; and he swears by this, as denoting not only his eternity, but his unchangeableness: "As I live, saith the Lord." Hither, likewise, we may refer those texts where he is called the "incorruptible God," (Rom. i. 23.) "The immortal king," (1 Tim. i. 17.) and is said "only to have immortality," (1 Tim. vi. 16.) And he is immutable likewise in his perfections; hence it is so often said in the Psalms, that "his

goodness and his mercy endure for ever:" his righteousness is likewise said to "endure for ever;" (Psal. cxi. 3.) and (Ps. xxxvi. 6.) to be "like the great mountains;" not only visible and conspicuous, but firm and immoveable: and the same, likewise, is said of his truth and faithfulness; (Psal. cxvii. 2.) "His truth endureth for ever:" and of his power; (Isa. xxvi. 4.) "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

And so likewise in his decrees, and purposes, and promises; (Psal. xxxiii. 11.) "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations." (Isa. xiv. 24.) "Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand." (Numb. xxiii. 19.) "God is not a man that he should lie, or as the son of man, that he should repent: hath he spoken, and shall not he do it? hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass?" If he hath made any promise, or entered into any covenant with us, it is firm and immutable. (Psal. lxxxix. 33.) "He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips." His covenant and his promise are in themselves immutable; but for our further assurance, God hath given us his oath, the highest sign of immutability; so the apostle to the Hebrews tells us, (chap. vi. 18.) "That by two immutable things (viz. his promise and his oath), in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope which is set before us." I proceed to the

III. Third thing I promised; which is, To answer an objection, which may seem to lie against what hath been said, from the mention so often made in Scripture, of God's repenting himself; as, Gen. vi. 6.

where it is said, that "it repented God that he had made man:" (1 Sam. xv. 11.) that "he repented that he had made Saul king." And (2 Sam. xxiv. 16.) "when the angel had stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it," it is said, that "the Lord repented him of the evil." And Psal. cxxxv. 14. the Lord saith there, that "he will repent himself concerning his servants."

To all which I answer, That this expression of God's repentance, we are to understand (as many others in Scripture) after the manner of men, and as spoken by way of condescension and accommodation to our weakness and capacity, and not as casting any imputation of mutability and inconstancy upon God; as if, out of levity, or for want of foresight, he did alter his mind: but when God is said to repent "that he made man," or "that he made Saul king," the change was not in him, but them; and it signifies, not that God was absolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reasonable expectation; and therefore, the Scripture clothes God with the human passion of repenting and grieving for what he had done, as men use to do when they are greatly disappointed, and fall short of their expectation.

And as for the other instances, wherein God is said to repent him of evils threatened; the expression only signifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which seemed to us to have been his peremptory purpose and resolution; that is, he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatenings seemed openly to express, because of some tacit condition implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from

the constancy and immutability of God: for when God did threaten, he spake what he did really purpose and intend, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened, upon which he was resolved, at that time when he threatened, to be taken off, and to stay his hand: and in thus doing, God doth not *mutare consilium, sed sententiam;* he doth not change his inward counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence, which was passed with reserved conditions, and unknown to us, on purpose to urge us the more effectually to repentance

And that God usually reserves such conditions, not only in his threatenings, but sometimes also in his promises, appears from that remarkable text—(Jer. xviii. 7—10.) "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." And from this very consideration, the same prophet encourageth the people to repentance; (Jer. xxvi. 13.) "Therefore, now amend your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced against you." And we have a famous instance of this in the case of Nineveh, the destruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his prophet; yet he stops the execution of the sentence, upon their repentance; (Jonah iii. 10.) "The men of Nineveh

turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil he said he would do unto them, and he did it not."

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the immutability of the Divine nature to ourselves; and the consideration of it may serve to several good purposes, both in reference to bad and good men.

First, In regard to sinners and wicked men.

And, first, The unchangeableness of God is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the sinner consider what God is, and the consideration of his unchangeable nature must needs terrify him: "He is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" (Hab. i. 13.) "He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity;" (Psal. v. 4, 5.) He is likewise a just God, and "will by no means clear the guilty," nor let sin go unpunished; (Exod. xxxiv. 7.) He is also omnipotent, and able to execute the vengeance threatened against sinners: "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" (Psal. xc. 11.) "Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" (Psal. lxxvi. 7.) "Strong is the Lord God who judgeth;" (Rev. xviii. 8.) And, which gives a sad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and just, and powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter or put off any of these properties, will never cease to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent sinners: and is it not "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of" this holy, and just, and omnipotent God, who lives for ever, and can punish for ever? Let all obstinate sinners hear

this, and tremble: you cannot be more obstinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily resolved to make you miserable. If you be determined upon a sinful course, God is also determined how he will deal with you; that he will not spare, but that "his anger and jealousy shall smoke against you," and that all the curses that are written in his book shall light upon you, and that he "will blot out your name from under heaven;" he hath sworn in his wrath, that unbelieving and impenitent sinners "shall not enter into his rest:" and, for the greater assurance of the thing, and that we may not think that there is any condition implied in these threatenings, he hath confirmed them by an oath; that by this "immutable sign, in which it is impossible for God to lie," sinners might have strong terrors, and not be able to fly to any, in hopes of refuge.

Secondly, The consideration of God's unchangeableness, should likewise be a very powerful argument to urge sinners to repentance. If they will but leave their sins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them, upon their repentance and submission; for "he is a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and ready to forgive;" he is unchangeably good, and "his mercy endureth for ever:" but if they will not come in, and submit to these terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and destruction; nothing then remains but a "fearful looking-for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them." God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace: and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant: there is a perfect and eternal opposition

between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent sinner; and it is impossible such an one should be happy till this opposition be removed; and to do that, there are but two ways imaginable, by changing God, or by changing ourselves. The nature of God is fixed and unalterable; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore, we must depart from our sinful and corrupt nature. God cannot quit his holiness; therefore, we must leave our sins: we can have no hope to change God; therefore, we must change ourselves. Rectify, sinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy lusts; do not venture upon impossibilities; rather think of altering thy sinful nature, which may be changed, than of altering the Divine nature, which is essentially immutable, "with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning." God hath once condescended so far as to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happiness: but if this will not do, he can go no lower; he will not, he cannot, put off his own nature to make us happy.

Secondly, In reference to good men, the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is matter of great consolation to them; in all the changes and vicissitudes of the world, their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, "the rock of ages," as the expression is in the prophet Isaiah; (chap. xxvi. 4.) it relies upon the unchangeable goodness and faithfulness of God, "all whose promises are yea, and amen," truth and certainty. All other supports and hopes may fail us: but "God will not suffer his faithfulness to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips," as the Psalmist assures us, (Psal. lxxxix. 33.) Men may break their word, and be less than their pro-

mises; but "God is faithful, who hath promised to give grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly." "He is not as man, that he should lie, or as the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he spoken, and shall he not do it? Hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass?"

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in God, it is usually on the merciful side; as when he stops the execution of his threatenings, upon the repentance of a sinful nation, as in that remarkable text which I mentioned before: (Jer. xviii. 7, 8.) "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them:" and so, likewise, when his faithful people and servants are in great distress, and there is no visible help and means of relief; in this case, likewise, God is said to repent, and to appear for their rescue; (Deut. xxxii. 36.) "The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone."

Thus we should comfort ourselves in the greatest extremities, with the consideration of the immutable goodness and faithfulness of God. The things of the world are mutable, and the men of the world; even those things which seem most constant, as the heavens; and to be settled upon the surest foundations, as the earth; yet these shall be changed: (Psal. cii. 25—27.) "Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou

shalt endure; all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." From whence the Psalmist infers this comfort to the church and people of God; (ver. 28.) "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."

Nothing that is mutable can be a solid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconstant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly trust to; and therefore, the apostle chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God. He only, that lives for ever, is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When God would comfort the Israelites in Egypt under their great oppression, he bids Moses only to declare to them his immutability; (Exod. iii. 14.) "Say unto them, I AM THAT I AM hath sent me unto you." And this is the great comfort of Christians, that he who is their Saviour and their hope, is "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever:" "he that was, and that is, and that is to come," in all durations the same.

We are continually changing, and are not the same we were; some of us were young, and now are old; once, perhaps, flourished in great prosperity, but now are poor and needy; were once strong and healthful, but now sickly and weak: it should comfort us in all these changes, that God is still the same, and he alone is instead of all other comforts and supports: when all other things fail, we may "rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation." Youth, and health, and riches, and

friends may forsake us; but God hath promised, that he "will never leave us, nor forsake us;" that he will not leave us when we are old, nor forsake us when our strength faileth; when our strength fails, and our heart fails, then is he the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever; and when our great change shall come, and the terrors of death shall take hold of us, we have still the same comfort, "the Lord liveth, and blessed be the God of our salvation."

In a word, the consideration of God's immutability, should keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be startled and surprised at them; according to that of the Psalmist, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, because his heart is fixed, trusting in God." This should make us constant to him and his truth, "steadfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;" it should make us "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," in full assurance that God will be as good to us as his word, and in a firm hope and persuasion of "that eternal life which God, that cannot lie, hath promised."

SERMON CXXXIII.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.—1 SAM. ii. 3.

I COME now to speak of those properties and perfections which relate to the Divine understanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. Knowledge considers things absolutely, and in themselves: wisdom considers the respects and relations of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The knowledge of God, is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their powers, and qualities, and circumstances: the wisdom of God, is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and opposition; of their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. The knowledge of God, only implies his bare understanding of things; but his wisdom, implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, to make every thing, and to govern and administer all things in number, weight, and measure. I shall at present speak of the first of these, the knowledge of God; which, as I said, is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature: of the powers, and qualities, and circumstances of things.

These words signify God to be "the fountain of knowledge;" that is, that he possesseth it himself, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I shall,

First, Endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to God.

Secondly, Shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the Divine knowledge.

Thirdly, Draw some practical inferences from the whole.

First, For the proof of it, I shall attempt it two ways:

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason.
2. From Scripture or Divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason. I begin with this first; because, unless this be established, all Divine revelation falls to the ground; unless natural reason assures us, that God is endowed with knowledge and understanding, it is in vain to inquire after Divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requisite on the part of the revealer, ability and integrity; that he have a perfect knowledge and understanding of the thing which he reveals, so that he cannot be deceived himself; and so much goodness and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now, unless our reason assure us that God is endowed with knowledge and understanding, the first condition is evidently wanting, viz. ability, and consequently, the second, integrity; for there cannot be goodness and veracity without knowledge.

This being premised, I proceed to the proof of it from such arguments as our natural reason suggests to us. I have formerly told you, that the Divine perfections are not to be proved by way of demonstration, but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdities and inconveniences of the contrary; for if we deny knowledge to God, we must deny it to be a perfection; we must deny it to be in any of the

creatures; we must attribute many other imperfections to God; all which are absurd to our natural reason; for natural reason dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to God will argue many other imperfections in the Divine nature: now these are so many arguments which natural reason offers to us to prove, that knowledge belongs to God.

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to God. Natural reason tells us, though the Scripture had not said it, that knowledge excels ignorance as much as light doth darkness; now whatever is perfect and excellent is to be attributed to the Divine nature; for this is the first notion we have of God, that he is a being absolutely perfect.

2. Knowledge is to be found in some of the creatures, and therefore is much more in God the Creator, because it is derived from him. Our very understandings, whereby we know God, or any thing else, are an argument that knowledge and understanding are in God. If "he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding," if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himself is much more possessed of it. The Scripture, indeed, useth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reason doth suggest to the most brutish and ignorant of men. (Psal. xciv. 8, 9.) "Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?"

3. The denial of this perfection to God, argues many other imperfections in the Divine nature. Nothing would more eclipse the Divine nature, than

to take away this perfection from it; this would bring an universal obscurity upon God's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn the brightness of the morning into the shadow of death. If we remove this perfection from God, we deny his wisdom. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or suit one thing to another. And we weaken his power. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would power be without knowledge? What irregular things would it produce? What untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power were let loose to act without the conduct of knowledge and understanding? And, consequently, we take away his providence; for without knowledge, there can be no counsel, no forecast of events, no provision for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all; for without knowledge there could be no such thing as goodness; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind necessity. There could be no veracity, nor justice, nor mercy in God; for all these suppose knowledge. He that speaks truth, must know it; he that is just, must understand right from wrong; he that shews mercy, must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved, and not to labour in a thing so plain and easy: take away the knowledge of God, and you render him incapable of any honour from his creatures; for if he know not what honour we do him, it is lost labour to give him any. And that we may see these are the deductions of natural reason, without the advantage of revelation, we shall find the heathens, who were destitute of Divine revelation, did

attribute this perfection to God. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to say, *Deos omnia cernere;* and we know the heathens were wont to swear, *Diis immortalibus testibus interpositis,* which is an owning of his omniscience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, et cogitantem, et animadvertentem, curiosum et negotii plenum deum?* De Nat. Deor. l. 1.

2. From Scripture, and Divine revelation. I will not heap up all those testimonies of Scripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only instance in two or three: (Job xxxvi. 4.) "He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee." (Chap. xxxvii. 16.) "Dost thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?"

Hither we may refer those texts which represent God, by way of condescension to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which signify his knowledge of what is done in the world; and those which speak of him, as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; "He giveth wisdom to the wise, and understanding to them that know understanding," (Dan. ii. 21.) And those which speak of God, as knowing the most secret things, "the hidden things of darkness," the hearts and the thoughts of men; and those things which are at the greatest distance, as future things; and of the greatest uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of these I shall particularly consider; for in proving that God knows all these, his knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage; for if any thing be out of the reach of the Divine understanding, it must, in all probability, be either those things which are secret and hid-

den, as men's secret actions, or their thoughts; or else those things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cause, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may be of great use to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

First of these; viz. That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even those that are most secret. And in the handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these three things:

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings," (Job xxxiv. 21.)

2. That he is a curious observer of them; "He seeth all his goings—he marks all his steps," takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; "There is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves," (Job xxxiv. 22.)

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two testimonies to this purpose. Tully lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for society; *Sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat deos intueri.* Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to say, πάντα θεοὺς εἰδέναι τά τε λεγόμενα καὶ πραττόμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βουλευόμενα. Arrian in his discourse upon Epictetus, tells us, it is necessary that every one should be persuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐφορᾶ-

τα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, "that every thing that is done by men is seen of God."

The Scripture frequently mentions this: (Psalm cxxxix. 1. &c. Prov. v. 21.) "The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." (Jer. xxxii. 19.) "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

2. He is a curious observer, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. Job saith, "He seeth all our steps;" and Solomon, that "He pondereth all our goings;" the word is, "he weighs them in a balance." So 1 Sam. ii. 3. "The Lord is a God of knowledge, by him actions are weighed." (Job xxxi. 4.) "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?" Which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactness of God's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumstances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them, whatever may commend an action, or blemish it, whatever may aggravate a sin, or excuse it. (Isai. xxvi. 7.) "Thou most upright, doth weigh the path of the just." There is not a good word that we speak, but God hears it; (Mal. iii. 16.) "And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him;" and all we do is "noted in his book," (Psal. lvi. 8.)

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we "do our alms in secret," when we "enter into our closets and shut the doors, our Father seeth in secret," (Matt. vi.) Nor can we retire ourselves to any place, where we can sin so as God shall not see us, where we can hide our sins from his sight,

or ourselves from his wrath. Hear how sensibly a heathen speaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκότος ἔνδον ποιήσετε, μέμνησθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι ἐστὲ: οὐ γὰρ ἔστε, αλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἔνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, καὶ τὶς τούτοις χρεία φωτὸς εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τὶ ποεῖτε; Arrian in Ep. l. 1. c. 14.

The Scripture is full of testimonies to this purpose: (Psal. xc. 8.) "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance;" those sins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the Divine knowledge, "darkness and light are all one to him;" (Psal. cxxxix. 11, 12. Jer. xvi. 17. xxiii. 24.) "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him?"

II. God knows the hearts and thoughts of men; which implies these two things:

First, His perfect knowledge of them.

Secondly, That this is his peculiar prerogative.

First, God perfectly knows the hearts of men, (Jer. xvii. 10.) "I the Lord, search the heart and try the reins;" where by "heart and reins," which are the most inward parts of the body, and lie least open to discovery, are signified the most secret thoughts and motions of the soul; these, God is said to "search and try," not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the Divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to signify to us the perfection and exactness of the Divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they search into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; so God is said to "search the heart," to signify to us that he knows the hearts of men as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the strictest search and most diligent examination; upon the same account he is

said elsewhere in Scripture to weigh the spirits of men: (Prov. xvi. 2.) "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits;" that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the secret motions and inclinations of men's hearts, as men have of those things which they weigh in a balance, with the greatest exactness.

Now that God hath this perfect knowledge of men's hearts, the Scripture frequently declares to us, that he knows the hearts of men: (1 Kings viii. 39.) "For thou, even thou, knowest the hearts of all the children of men." (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." How close and reserved soever men may be, what disguise soever they may use to hide their purposes from men, yet God sees them; the things which are most dark and secret are open to his view. (Psal. xliv. 21.) "He knoweth the secrets of the hearts." (Prov. xv. 11.) "Hell and destruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?" Whatever pretences men may make, God sees through them, and discovers the very intentions of their hearts. (Psal. vii. 9.) "The righteous Lord trieth the heart and reins." (Heb. iv. 13.) It is said there of "the word of God," that it is "a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all things are naked, and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do, and there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight;" nay, he knows our thoughts at a distance, what they will be, before any actually are. (Psal. cxxxix. 2.) "Thou knowest my thoughts afar off." It is true, indeed, every man is conscious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are present,

and when they are past, if he have not forgot them; but no man knows what he shall think to-morrow, but this God knows; for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do ourselves; "God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things," (1 John iii. 20.)

And though the Scripture had not revealed this so plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of God; the reason of our minds tells us, that God knows our hearts; and the fears and jealousies of our minds are an evidence of it.

1st, The reason of every man's mind tells him, that the supreme Being whom we call God, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that he excels in knowledge; and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend itself to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of God, in respect of all objects, is like the sun in respect of this lower world; "nothing is hid from the light of it." We have naturally this apprehension of God, that he is an immense Being, every where present; that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and consequently, that he is present to our spirits, and sees all the motions of our minds, and discerns the very secrets of our hearts; and there can be no such thing as secrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And, to convince us that these are the dictates of natural reason, without the help and assistance of Divine revelation, we shall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were

firmly possessed with this apprehension, that God knows the hearts of men. This may be sufficiently collected from the frequent sayings of the wiser heathens to this purpose: that the best and most acceptable worship of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this sense, Tully speaks; *Cultus autem deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper pura, integra atque incorrupta mente et voce veneremur;* "The best and holiest worship of the gods, is to worship them with a pure, and upright, and sincere mind." To the same purpose is that known saying of the poet,

Compositum jus fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, et incoctum generoso pectus honesto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis, et farre litabo:

"Do but offer to God a mind inwardly resolved to be just and honest, and the plainest sacrifice will please him." Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honest disposition of mind, to be most acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did most firmly believe that God knows the secrets of men's hearts; otherwise there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themselves this way to the Divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by consequence; there are many express passages in their writings, which do sufficiently signify their belief of this principle. Thales, one of their most ancient philosophers, being asked, "If an unjust man could conceal himself from God?" he answered, "He cannot so much as hide from him the very thoughts and design of

it." Socrates (as Xenophon tells) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his scholars, that "the gods know all things, what we say, and what we do, and what we think in silence." To the same purpose, Arrian, in his dissertations upon Epictetus, laying down the principles of a virtuous life; "First of all, (saith he,) we must learn this, that there is a God who takes care of the world, and that there is nothing hid from him, not only what we do, but not so much as what we think and design." So likewise Tully, in his book of Laws: "Let every man be firmly persuaded of this; that the gods see what every man is, and with what mind and devotion they serve them." I will add but one testimony more, and that is of Seneca, in his epistles: *Nihil Deo clausum est, interest animis nostris, et cogitationibus mediis intervenit;* "We can keep nothing close from God, for he is present to our minds, and intimate to our thoughts:" so that you see this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reason themselves into it.

2dly, The natural fears of men are likewise a secret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and such as happen upon surprise, and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate sense of our minds, and do more truly discover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate discourse. If I see a man upon the sudden sight of a serpent recoil and start back, though he tell me never so often that he is not afraid, yet I am sufficiently convinced of the contrary, because I see in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of

fear and danger; so if men find that, upon the designing of a secret wickedness, which never went further than their own hearts, their consciences do sting and lash them; that they have a sense of guilt, and feel inward frights and horrors, whatever they may say to the contrary; this is a natural acknowledgment of an invisible eye that sees them, and disallows their wicked designs. If that be true which the heathen poet says, that

> *Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,*
> *Facti crimen habet;*

"He that meditates any secret wickedness in his heart, is guilty to himself, as if he had committed it;" this is a plain confession, that the man stands in awe of something besides himself, and is jealous that there is one that is conscious to what he thinks.

II. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of men's hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is implied in the answer to that question, "Who can know the heart of man?" (Jer. xvii. 10.) "I the Lord search the heart, and try the reins;" this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, "a knower of the heart." (1 Kings viii. 39.) "Thou, even thou, only knowest the hearts of all the children of men." Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and designs of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conscious to their own thoughts and purposes; "the spirit of a man that is in him knows the things of a man," but they cannot see into the secrets of another man's mind; it is God alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the se-

cret and inward workings of it are not subject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions: (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) " The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;" our knowledge is but superficial, and glides upon the outside and surface of things, but the Divine knowledge pierceth to the very centre of every thing. Now the darkest place, the most inward retirement, the privatest closet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this God only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium et speculator omnium, a quo nihil secretum esse potest, tenebris interest, interest et cogitationibus nostris quasi alteris tenebris,* saith Min. Felix; " God made all things, and sees all things, and therefore nothing can be secret from him; he is present in darkness, and he is present to the thoughts of men, which are as it were another and a thicker darkness."

The devil, indeed, pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's heart better than God himself; and that notwithstanding the testimony which God gave of his integrity; yet if he were but soundly tried by affliction, he would renounce God, and curse him to his face: but the event proved how groundless and malicious this suggestion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the passages of some divines concerning the devil's immediate access to the minds of men, and his power to cast wicked thoughts into them; which seems by consequence to grant him some knowledge of men's hearts; for, by the same reason that he can imprint

thoughts upon men's minds, he may see those that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very sagacious spirit, and can make very shrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of men's minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and observation of our tempers and passions, of our interests and designs, and from the general tenor of our actions in public and private, and from our prayers and confessions to God (if he permit him at any time to be so near good men), I think there is no doubt, but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and such as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the business of casting blasphemous and despairing thoughts into the minds of men; to this I would say these three things:

1. That there are few of these cases which may not more probably be resolved into the wickedness and infidelity of men's hearts, or into the darkness and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raise and suggest strange thoughts to men, and such as we may be apt to think have no rise from ourselves, not considering what an odd and strange influence the disorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we see in violent fevers, and several other diseases; and melancholy, though the workings of it are more still and quiet, is as truly a disease as any other; so that I choose rather to ascribe as much of these to a bodily distemper as may be, because it is a very uncomfortable consideration, to think that the devil hath such an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not see how by any means it can be grant-

ed, with prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the Scripture plainly gives him, of being " the only knower of the heart," that the devil can have so immediate an access to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is said, (1 Chron. xxi. 1.) that " Satan provoked David to number the people;" and (Luke xxii. 3.) that " the devil entered into Judas;" and (Acts v. 3.) that " Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie unto the Holy Ghost;" and (Eph. ii. 2.) that " the devil is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience;" I say, I cannot think that any or all of these expressions do amount to such an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into men's minds; but they only signify, that the devil hath a greater hand in some sins than others, and that a heart, wickedly bent and inclined, gives him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully, by presenting the occasions of such wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is usual, in Scripture phrase, as to ascribe all good motions to God's Spirit, so all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cause of them, but because he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I see no reason to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the secret thoughts of men's minds; for this seems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of men's hearts, and to give him a key to that closet which God hath reserved to himself: for it is a very nice distinction which is here made between the thoughts of men's minds, and the images of their fancies; and if these should happen to be but words that signify the same

thing, we shall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of God. Therefore, because the Scripture is a stranger to these nice and subtle distinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much safer to assert the prerogative of God in that latitude that the Scripture useth the word heart; for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our souls are totally exempted from the immediate cognizance of any other spirit but God's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture, from the particular knowledge of men's tempers, and habits, and designs, and the course of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Third particular; God's knowledge of future events. This God proposes as the way to discern the true God from idols: (Isaiah xli. 21, &c.) "Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob;" that is, let them bring some argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he instanceth in foretelling future events; (ver. 22.) "Let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." God puts it upon this issue—if they can foretel future things, then they are gods; if not, they are "vanity, and a work of nought, and he is an abomination that chooseth them," (ver. 24.) By things to come, I understand such effects as do not depend upon any necessary cause, but upon the will

of free agents, and so may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I shall consider these two things:

1. That God knows future events.

2. That he only knows them.

1. God knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from Scripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the best part of wisdom: and, unless this did belong to God, how could he govern the world? The heathens, except only the Epicureans, generally granted this, as appears in those wise counsels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpose, that we should not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to God, who only knows them, and disposeth them.

> *Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid*
> *Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.* Juv.

And afterward, saith he, "We are importunate with God for wife and children:"

At illis notum, qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor.

And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from those apprehensions which they had of divination. Tully lays down this for a principle, *Deos posse nobis signa futurarum rerum ostendere:* (de Legibus.) And in his book de Divin. he tells us, "that there was such a thing as divination; for it was an old opinion, *Jam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque pop. Rom. et omnium gentium*

firmata consensu:" and afterward, "that this divination was not, *sine instinctu afflatuque divino.*"

I know they did variously explain this, according to their several opinions about fate and contingency, and their apprehensions about the providence of God. One sect of them, the Stoics, held that there was a fatal chain of causes from first to last, and things did necessarily follow one another; and by this means they made fore-knowledge easy and explicable; and though in their disputes they seem to grant no such things as events and contingencies, yet they are agreed in the thing, that those things which we call events, though they would not call them so, were foreknown to God. And for this I shall only cite one testimony of Seneca: speaking of God's fore-knowledge of the most contingent things, the dispositions of men long before they are born; he adds, *Nota est enim illis operis sui series, omniumque illis rerum per manus suas iturarum scientia in aperto semper est; nobis ex abdito subit; et quæ repentina putamus, illis provisa veniunt et familiaria;* and how peremptory soever this sect is in their disputes about fate, yet when they speak of the τα εφ' ἡμιν, and generally in their moral discourses, they seem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal necessity.

And those other sects of the philosophers that denied fate, did generally grant God's fore-knowledge of contingent things. I grant, indeed, that they did rather make God's fore-knowledge an arbitrary and voluntary, than a necessary perfection; that is, that God, when he pleased to apply himself to it, could foreknow all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to small and inconsiderable things, so neither his fore-

knowledge. But Tully seems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the least things: *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, et omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum et negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot say he is constant to himself: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleased to trouble himself with it; and had they not in this mistaken the nature of God, they might easily have apprehended, that it is no trouble nor weariness to an infinite understanding, that is always in act, to know the least things, how many soever they be.

2. From Scripture, which gives us testimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Testimonies, (Isa. xlviii. 3, &c. Acts xv. 18.) "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world," ἀπ' αἰῶνος, from everlasting; which, by the way, I cannot but compare with the forecited place of Seneca, *Nota enim illis operis sui series*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from Scripture: I will mention but one—the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened. (Gen. xv. 13.) God foretels the children of Israel's deliverance after four hundred and thirty years, which he punctually accomplished, (Exod. xii. 40, 41.) The prophet that prophesied against the altar at Bethel, named the man that should do it, Josias, three hundred and fifty years beforehand, (1 Kings xiii. 2.) The deliverance of the children of Israel from the Babylonish captivity was foretold one hundred years before to be done particularly by Cyrus; which is so strange, that the prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wisdom and power, (Isa.

xliv. 24, &c.) Which was afterward precisely fulfilled, when the seventy years were expired. How are the life and death of the Messias, with many particular circumstances foretold! And did not he foretel the destruction of Jerusalem forty years before?

But, because there may be no contingency in good things, God himself may be resolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you shall find that the worst things have been foretold; the apostacy of the children of Israel, (Deut. xxxi. 16.) and their infidelity in times of the gospel, (Isa. liii. 1. 5. 9.) Our Saviour foretold the treachery of Judas, and Peter's denial of him: now, these are so evil, that it were blasphemy to suppose the holy God to have any hand in them; and, therefore, are foretold by him merely by virtue of his fore-knowledge, and infiniteness of his understanding, which reacheth things at the greatest distance that are most contingent.

SERMON CXXXIV.

OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.—1 Sam. ii. 3.

I have considered this perfection of God, in some of the greatest and most difficult instances of it, his knowledge of the most secret things, the hearts of men, and future events; against the last of which there are some objections, which I come now briefly to consider, and pass on to what remains.

Objection the first; The impossibility of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true: but future events, which may or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth; that is, it is not certain either that they will or will not be, because they have no certain cause; therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Answer.—This I confess is the grand difficulty; I shall not be so solicitous to take it away, as to give satisfaction to it.

1. I might say, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the cause, but of the object, which may be certain, though the cause be contingent. Which I prove thus: whatever event hath actually happened, as, because now it is past, it is certainly true that it was; so, because it once was, it was certainly true, before it was, that it would be, as in Peter's

denying of Christ. If it be now true that he hath denied him, it was true before, that he would deny him; and it being determinately true, God saw it as it was; so that here is an object of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the possibility of God's knowing future contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that God doth know them. I will give but one instance for the proof of this. Nothing more evident than the sin of Adam; yet God foreknew this, how else was Christ "decreed before the foundation of the world?" Christ was a remedy upon the occasion of sin; now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was foreseen: and this being certain, *cum constat de re, frustra inquiritur de modo:* "when we are certain of the thing, it is not necessary to know the manner." We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the soul and body, though no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter; that is, that the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀφάνταστα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best reason and understanding can give no account.

3. It is very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties

and measures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we should be like God in knowledge, our understandings would be infinite like his; and in this case especially it becomes us to put on the modesty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant spirits take it for an affront to their understandings, that any one should expect they should believe any thing, though they have the highest assurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unless they may be satisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are those who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some say, that God sees future events *in speculo voluntatis;* others say, that the eternity of God is actually commensurate to all duration, as his immensity to all space, and so God doth not so properly foresee and foreknow, as see and know future things by the presentiality and coexistence of all things in eternity; for, they say, that future things are actually present and existing to God, though not in *mensura propria*, yet in *mensura aliena:* the schoolmen have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the understanding these phrases; but to me they seem to signify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever since, lest they should seem to be ignorant, would seem to understand; but I wonder most, that men, when they have amused and puzzled themselves and others with hard words, should call this explaining things.

The sum of the answer is this: that when we have done all we can, God's fore-knowledge of future events may seem contradictious and impossible to us; much less do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have sufficient assurance of the thing, and unless we had infinite understandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, that if we can admit such a knowledge in God as seems contradictious and impossible to our reason, why may we not allow and frame such notions of his goodness and justice?

To this I answer, There is a great difference between those perfections of God which are imitable, and those which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God; and if we are assured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not necessary that we should know the manner of it, and disentangle it from contradiction and impossibility: but it is otherwise in God's goodness and justice, which are imitable; he that imitates, endeavours to be like something that he knows, and we must have a clear idea and notion of that which we would bring ourselves to the likeness of; these perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of these perfections is chiefly recommended to us in Scripture. (Jer. ix. 24.) By these God reveals himself, and declares his name, and makes himself known to us, even by those attributes which declare his goodness, and mercy, and justice. (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3—5.) When God would give a description of himself to Moses, he promises to " cause his goodness to pass

before him." So that it doth not follow, that, because God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithstanding the seeming contradiction and impossibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's justice or goodness that seems contradictious or impossible. The

Third objection is made up of several inconveniences that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foresees we will do; for otherwise his knowledge would be fallible.

Answer.—God's fore-knowledge lays no necessity upon the event; in every event, we may consider the effect in itself, or with relation to the cause, and the manner how it comes to pass; considered in itself, it is future—with relation to its causes, it is contingent. God sees it as both, and so, as that which, until it is, may be, or not be; and when it comes to pass, he sees the man do it freely; and so before it be done, it hath no necessity; but upon supposition of foresight; as, when it is, as Origen excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not the cause of the things that are foreknown; but because the thing is future and shall be, this is the reason why it is foreknown; for it doth not, because it was known, come to pass, but because it was to come to pass, therefore it was foreknown; and bare knowledge is no more the cause of any event, which because it is known must infallibly be, than my seeing a man run is the cause of his running, which, because I do see, is infallibly so.

2. If God infallibly foreknows what men will do,

how can he be serious, in his exhortations to repentance, in his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Answer.—All these are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance, and expects it, because by his grace we may do it: he is said to grieve for our impenitency, because we may do otherwise, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themselves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obstinacy and hardness, they may be rendered vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lie upon *serious*, and you ask how God can exhort men seriously to that which he foresees that they will not do; those whom he foreknows will be finally impenitent? I answer, If his exhortations were not serious, he could not foresee the final impenitency of men. To foresee men's final impenitency, is to foresee their wilful contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace: now men's wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be foreseen, unless God foresee that his exhortations are serious, and in good earnest.

Having answered the objections against God's foreknowing future events, I proceed to shew,

II. That God only knows future events. (Isa. xliv. 6, 7.) "Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God: and who, as I, shall call and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them." (Isa. xlvi. 9, 10.) "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none

like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

The reason is evident, because the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially, if we grant it to be beyond our finite understandings, to explain the possibility of such a knowledge; for, to be sure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any understanding.

But it may be here objected, Did not the oracles among the heathens foretel several things, which Christians are satisfied came from the devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of heathen oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a spirit; yet the darkness and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is such, as shews that the devil was conscious to himself of the uncertainty of his knowledge in those matters: and those few that came to pass and are in any tolerable sense said to be accomplished, were in such matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the devil to be a sagacious spirit), or else in disjunctive cases; as, when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it must either be so, or so, in which a bold guessing may often hit right: but guessing at future things is far from a knowledge of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumstances of time and person, such as we find in Scripture in many instances, to the prediction of which,

the greatest sagacity and the utmost guessing could do nothing, such as those predictions of which I gave instances out of Scripture.

I have now done with the first general head I proposed to be spoken to from these words; viz. To prove that this attribute of knowledge belongs to God. I proceed to the

Second; viz. To consider the perfection and prerogative of the Divine knowledge; which I shall speak to in these following particulars:

1. God's knowledge is present and actual, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act: it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we must take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and steady comprehension of things; he being every where present, and all eye, nothing can escape his sight, but all objects are at once in the view of the Divine understanding. (Heb. iv. 13.) "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

2. God's knowledge is an intimate and thorough knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and essence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and superficial; our knowledge glides upon the superfices of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it seldom reacheth further than the skin and outward appearance of things; we do not know

things in their realities, but as they appear and are represented to us with all their masks and disguises: but God knows things as they are. (1 Sam. xvi. 7.) "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart:" God knows things throughout all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of God penetrates into every thing; the light of the Divine understanding lays all things "open and naked." (Heb. iv. 13.) In which expression the apostle alludes to the sacrifices of beasts, which were flayed, and cleft down the back-bone, that the priest might look into them, and see whether they were without blemish. To the eye of our understandings most objects are close, and have their skins upon them; but to the eyes of God all things are uncovered and dissected, and lie open to his view.

3. God's knowledge is clear and distinct. Our understandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confusion; we are often deceived with the near likeness and resemblance of things, and mistake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not sufficiently separate and distinguish things from one another; we see things many times together, and in a heap, and do but know them in gross: but there is no confusion in the Divine understanding; that is a clear light, which separates and distinguisheth things of the greatest nearness and resemblance: God hath a particular knowledge of the least things: (Luke xii. 7.) "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered;" those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another; "the very hairs of your head" are severally and distinctly known to God.

4. God's knowledge is certain and infallible. We are subject to doubt and error in our understanding of things; every thing almost imposeth upon our understandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwise than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our interest and advantage, our humours and distempers; these all misrepresent things, and darken our minds, and seduce our judgments, and betray us to error and mistake: but the Divine understanding is a clear, fixed, constant, and undisturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no stain from affection, or interest, or any other thing. Men are many times confident, and apt to impose upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the Divine understanding, that it is secure from all possibility of error: it is God only "that cannot lie," (Tit. i. 2.) because he cannot be deceived: the infallibility of God, is the foundation of his veracity.

5. The knowledge of God is easy, and without difficulty. We must dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain the knowledge of things without search and study, and great intention of mind; we strive to comprehend some things, but they are so vast that we cannot: other things are at such a distance, that our understanding is too weak to discern them; other things are so little, and small, and nice, that our understanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to such a point as to fasten upon them; but the understanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a distance from it, nothing too great and vast for its comprehension: nor is there any thing so little, that it can escape his knowledge

and animadversion. The great wisdom of Solomon is compared to the sand on the sea-shore; the shore is vast, but the sands are little (saith one), to signify that the vast mind of Solomon did comprehend the least things. It is much more true of God; his understanding is a vast comprehension of the least things, as well as the greatest; and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without study, and his understanding is in continual exercise without weariness. How many things are there which we cannot find out without search, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to understand them? But all things are obvious to God, and lie open to his view.

He is said, indeed, in Scripture, to "search the heart," and to "try the reins," and to "weigh the spirits:" but these expressions do not signify the painfulness, but the perfection of his knowledge; that he knows those things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we use the greatest diligence and exactness.

6. The knowledge of God is universal, and extends to all objects. We know but a few things; our ignorance is greater than our knowledge; *Maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus:* but the Divine understanding is vast and comprehensive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; "he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things;" he knows himself, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the secrets of his will. (1 Cor. ii. 11.) "The Spirit of God searcheth the deep things of God;" he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of God is

infinite; (Psal. cxlvii. 5.) " His understanding is infinite :" he knows himself, and his own perfections, and all the possibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the understanding of God being infinite, is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite understandings are liable to alterations; they may grow, or decline: but the knowledge of God is a full, constant light, it is always the same, not liable to any eclipse, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the same.

Thirdly, I come now to draw some inferences from the several parts of this discourse.

I. From the perfection of God's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the Divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiseth our admiration, and none more than knowledge: there is nothing that we value ourselves, or others, more by than this: the highest knowledge of man, the most glorious understanding, that ever any one of the sons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of God, but as a glow-worm to the sun. If we admire these candles of the Lord, which shine so imperfectly in the dark ; if we reverence a little knowledge, compassed about with ignorance; how should we admire " the Father of lights, in whom is no darkness at all," that knowledge which hath nothing of blemish or imperfection in it!

2. We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account—as we have all our knowledge from him: " What have we that we have not received?" and as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the Divine understanding. We are blind and ignorant; it is but a few things

that we are capable of knowing: and we know but a few of those things which our natures are capable of knowing; and of those things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect; it is slight and superficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confusion in the use of it; the clearest reason, and the brightest understanding of man, hath many flaws and defects in it: so that the more we know of God and of ourselves, the more humble we shall be. It is an empty knowledge, and falsely so called, that puffs up; as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raise up themselves; but those which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads: so it is only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up; but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement; he knows our wants and weakness, "and will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear, for he considers that we are but dust;" he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleases, put a hook in their nose, and his bridle in their lips, as he did to Sennacherib, (2 Kings xix. 28.)

II. From God's knowing our secret actions, I infer,

1. If God sees our most secret actions, this discovers and confutes the secret atheism of many. He that commits the most secret sin, denies the omniscience of God. Thus David describes the atheism of some in his days: "He hath said in his heart, God hath forgot; he hideth his face, he will never see it: the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." And is not this, in effect, to deny God's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a

sun, as deny that it shines and enlightens the world.

There are some relics of this even in the best men, which do at some times discover themselves: (Psal. lxxiii. 10, 11.) "Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them: and they say, How doth God know; is there knowledge in the Most High?" that is, the people of God come to this, when they are come to an afflicted state, and see the prosperity of wicked men; they come to this, to question the providence of God, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheism reigns in wicked men; while they live in their sins, they live in the denial of God's omniscience: for did men really believe that God sees in secret, that his eye perceiveth the darkness, and lays open and naked all things before it, how durst they lie, and steal, and swear falsely? Vain man! why dost thou seek darkness and retirement? how art thou alone, if thou believest that God is every where? How canst thou retire from him? How canst thou shut him out? If thou believest that he is light, what security is darkness to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greatest and best person in the world, who is thy sovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy master, and thy best friend (for we use to reverence persons under these notions and relations, and to be ashamed to do any thing that is vile and unseemly before them); if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not ashamed? why does not thy blood rise in thy face? Why should not shame and fear work upon the apprehension of God's seeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that God sees thee, is a greater surprise and dis-

covery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world stood by thee.

2. Live as those that believe this: be continually under the power of this apprehension, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this would have a double influence upon us; it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a restraint upon us as to sin; *Sic vivamus tanquam in conspectu vivamus.*—Seneca. It were well if men would live as if any body saw them; but to live as if some worthy and excellent person were always present with us, and did observe us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are some sins of that ugliness and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the presence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are some persons of such worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditi quoque homines vitia supprimerent.* Epicurus had this good conceit of himself, that he could advise others so to act as if he stood by, *Fac omnia tanquam spectet Epicurus:* but Seneca instanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lælius;

Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus.

And shall not the presence of the Divine Majesty be an eternal restraint upon us?

This was David's course to keep himself from sin: (Psal. xxxix. 1.) "I will take heed to my ways, while the wicked is before me;" how much more in the presence of God? "I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee," (Psal. cxix. 168.) And it was wisely advised by Seneca, "That we should so live when we are among men, as believing God sees us;" and "when

there is none but he sees us, let us behave ourselves before him, as if men did stare upon us."

III. God's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocrisy: how vain is it to make a show of that outwardly, which inwardly, and in our hearts, we are not; to put on a mask of religion, and paint ourselves beautifully without, when "inwardly we are full of rottenness and uncleanness;" to "honour God with our lips, when our hearts are far from him?" If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them; therefore the best way for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear: but having to deal with God, who "knows our thoughts afar off," to whom all our disguises are transparent, and all our little arts of concealment signify nothing; it is a madness to hide our iniquity in our bosom. With this argument our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical pharisees: (Luke xvi. 15.) "Ye are they that justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts."

2. If God know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourselves with inward purity and holiness, because of the pure eyes which behold the most intimate and secret motions of your souls; therefore "cleanse your hearts from wickedness: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?" Fear and shame from men lay a great restraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a strange freedom do we take within our own breasts? This is an argument of the secret atheism that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himself in any wicked thoughts and imagi-

nations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares that he reverenceth men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or despiseth him.

Therefore "keep your hearts with all diligence," because they are peculiarly under God's inspection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts because no eye sees you, ask yourselves, "Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it?" as the wise man speaks, (Prov. xxiv. 12.)

And whatever you do in the service of God, "do it heartily as to the Lord." Indeed, if we did only worship God, "to be seen of men," an external worship would be sufficient: but religion is not intended to please men, but God; he is a Spirit, and sees our spirits, therefore we must "worship him in spirit and in truth." (1 Thess. ii. 4.) "Not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts." David useth this argument to his son, Solomon: (1 Chron. xxviii. 9.) "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Whatever liberty we may take to ourselves now, and how careless soever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the Scripture assures us, that he who now sees our hearts, will one day judge us according to them: (Jer. xvii. 10.) "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways." And the apostle speaks of a "day coming wherein God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," (Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.)

3. This is matter of encouragement to us in many

cases: in our secret troubles; (Psalm cxlii. 3) "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knowest my path." In cases of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men; which though we do not know yet, God knows them: so the apostles, (Acts i. 24.) when they did not know whom to choose for an apostle, they refer it to God; and "they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." But, especially, this is matter of comfort to us, when we suffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocrisy, and falseness, and insincerity; then to be able to appeal to "the searcher of hearts," as to our innocency and sincerity, and to say with the prophet Jeremiah, "O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cause;" (chap. xx. 12.) and with St. Peter, "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness," (Acts xv. 8.)

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing: "The Lord knows the thoughts of men, that they are vanity;" (Psal. xciv. 11.) because he knows them, and can defeat them; he can "bring their counsels to nought, and make their devices of none effect." He is conscious to the first motions of their hearts; he sees those cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can snare them in their own policies, and "turn their counsels into foolishness." Thou that puttest a mask upon a wicked design, and hidest the malice and revenge of thine heart under a dissembling countenance, God sees thy design, and hath a thousand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their de-

sign sure with all imaginable caution, and that their counsels cannot miscarry, being out of all possibility of human discovery or prevention; for all this, their counsels may come to nought, and though they have resolved it, yet it may not stand; "He that sits in the heavens laughs at them, the Lord hath them in derision." As wise as they are, they are guilty of this oversight, that they did not take God into consideration, by whom they are surprised and discovered. He that sees their design, can blast it in a moment; he "can speak the word," and "thy breath shall go forth, and thou shalt return to thy dust, and in that very day thy thoughts perish," (Psal. cxlvi. 4.)

5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then "what art thou, O man, that judgest another's heart?" This condemns the uncharitableness of men, who take upon them to judge and censure men's hearts; which is, "to speak evil of the things which they know not;" to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James saith, (chap. iv. 12.) "There is one lawgiver, that is able to save, and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?" is proportionably true in this case; there is but "one that knows the heart; who art thou then that judgest another man's heart?" Who art thou, O man, that takest upon thee to sit in judgment upon thy brother, and to pass sentence upon his heart, to pronounce him a hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch? Art thou a man, and "the son of man," and wilt thou assume to thyself the prerogative of God? Man can only look to the outward appearance; but "God seeth the heart."

There is nothing doth more palpably discover the

unchristian spirit of that new sect which is of late risen up amongst us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to censure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breast: but they are not alone guilty of this; those who are so ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule; or a man wicked, as to his present state, if the general course of his life and actions be wicked; for our Saviour tells us, "by their fruits ye shall know them." This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be sure it is so: but to call any man a hypocrite, who makes an outward profession of religion, and whose external conversation is unblameable; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou canst have no evidence; this is to "ascend into heaven," and step into "the throne of God, and to be like the Most High;" for "he, even he only, knows the hearts of the children of men."

IV. From God's knowledge of future events, we may learn,

1. The vanity of astrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretel future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of these arts hath been sufficiently shewn by learned men, from the weakness and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon: I shall only for the present take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that "God only knows future events." From prudent collections and observations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in some cases; but there are no certain prospective glasses, with which we can see future events, but Divine revelation; therefore, whoever takes upon him to foretel future

events without Divine revelation, he arrogates to himself that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and God delights to chastise the curiosity, and cross the predictions, of these vain pretenders: (Isai. xliv. 24, 25.) "Thus saith the Lord that formed thee; I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish." As he also in Scripture threatens those who consult them, and rely upon them; those who go to astrologers, or wise men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and inquire of the events of their life, they "forsake God," and "betake themselves to lying vanities."

2. Refer future things to God, who only knows them; trust him with all events; "cast your care upon him." When you have used your best prudence, and wisdom, and diligence for your supply and security for the future, leave the rest to God, "for your heavenly Father knoweth" both your wants and your dangers. When we are over-solicitous about future things, we take God's proper work out of his hands, and usurp the government of the world. Why do we "take too much upon us? We are but of yesterday, and know not what will be to-morrow."

Mind your present duty and work, and leave events to God: "Secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those things that are revealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all the words of this law," (Deut. xxix. 29.) Do your duty, "commit the rest to God in well-doing."

In this world we are in a mixed condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happiness and misery:

what is good for us to know is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wisdom and pity to mankind, God hath concealed and hid the rest from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us; because the best things of this world are but shallow and empty, and if we could see them beforehand, we should prevent ourselves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the sweetness which is in them by delightful forethoughts of them: and he hath concealed future evils from us, lest we should torment ourselves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosa nocte premit Deus.
Ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make yourselves miserable with fear of being so; *ante miserias miser.* Use all wise means to prevent what you fear, and then be satisfied, and be as happy as you can till misery come; go not forth to meet it, "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;" do not anticipate the evils of to-morrow, and take present possession of an evil to come; "cast your care upon Him" who hath promised to care for you.

SERMON CXXXV.

THE WISDOM, GLORY, AND SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and ever.—JUDE, ver. 25.

I AM treating of the attributes of God, particularly of those which relate to the Divine understanding, his knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge of God, only implies his bare understanding of things; but his wisdom, implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, the skill of making, and governing, and administering all things in number, weight, and measure. The knowledge of God rather considers things absolutely, and in themselves: the wisdom of God, considers rather the respects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means and ends: accordingly, I describe them thus: the knowledge of God, is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumstances. The wisdom of God, is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and opposition, their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. I have largely spoken to the first of these: I come now to the

Second, The wisdom of God in general; together with his majesty and sovereignty, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

First, That God is "the only wise God." In handling of this, I shall shew,

I. In what sense God may be said to be "the only wise God."

II. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

I. In what sense God may be said to be "the only wise God." For answer to this, we may take notice, that there are some perfections of God that are incommunicable to the creatures; as, his independency and eternity: these God only possesseth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is independent and eternal: but there are other perfections which are communicable; that is, which the creatures may, in some measure and degree, partake of; as knowledge, and wisdom, and goodness, and justice, and power, and the like; yet these the Scriptures do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in such a peculiar and Divine manner, as doth shut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them. I shall give you some instances of this:—His goodness; this is reserved to God alone, (Matt. xix. 17.) "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God:" his power and immortality, (1 Tim. vi. 15, 16.) "Who is the blessed and only Potentate; who only hath immortality:" his wisdom, (1 Tim. i. 17.) "The only wise God:" (Rom. xvi. 27.) "To God only wise be glory:" his holiness, (Rev. xv. 14.) "For thou only art holy." The transcendent degree and singularity of these Divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive; so that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: so that, in this sense, "there is none good but

God ;" he only is holy, he is the only wise : in so inconceivable a manner doth God possess even those perfections, which in some degree he communicates ; and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesseth them ; so that when we consider any of these Divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature ; but we must say, that the goodness and wisdom of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, God may be said to be only wise in these two respects :

1. As being originally and independently wise.
2. As being eminently and transcendently so.

1. God only is originally and independently wise. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him : (Rom. xi. 33, 34.) " O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor ? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again ? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen." He challengeth any creature to come forth and say, that they have given wisdom, or any other perfection, to God. No, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him : (Prov. ii. 6.) " For the Lord giveth wisdom." (Eccles. ii. 26.) " God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." (Dan. ii. 21.) " He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding."

2. He is eminently and transcendently so : and

this follows from the former, because God is the fountain of wisdom, therefore it is most eminently in him: (Psal. xciv. 9, 10.) "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?" In like manner, we may reason concerning all other attributes of God, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently possessed of them himself; the greatest wisdom of the creatures is nothing in opposition to the wisdom of God, nothing in comparison of it.

Nothing in opposition to it: (Job v. 13.) "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." (Job ix. 4.) "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him and prospered?" (Prov. xxi. 30.) "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord." (1 Cor. i. 19.) "He will destroy the wisdom of the wise;" (ver. 27.) "and by foolish things confound the wise."

Nothing in comparison of it. There are a great many that pretend to wisdom, but most are destitute of true wisdom; and those who have it, have it with many imperfections and disadvantages. Usually those who are destitute of true wisdom, pretend most to it: (Job xi. 12.) "Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt." The high and the great of this world pretend to it: (Job xxxii. 9.) "Great men are not always wise." Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philosophers were great professors of wisdom: (Rom. i. 22.) "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools:" they were "wise to do evil, but to do good they had no understanding," as the prophet speaks, (Jer. iv. 22.) The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a craftiness

than a wisdom. Men call it prudence; but they are glad to use many arts to set it off, and make it look like wisdom; by silence, and secrecy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods, and gestures. The Scripture calls it "the wisdom of this world," (1 Cor. ii. 6.) and a "fleshly wisdom," (2 Cor. i. 12.) It is wisdom misapplied: it is the pursuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and designs of this world are far from wisdom: (1 Cor. iii. 20.) "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain." That cannot be wisdom, which mistakes its great end, which minds mean things, and neglects those which are of greatest concernment to them: (Job xxii. 2.) "He that is wise, is profitable to himself." (Prov. ix. 12.) "If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself." Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to say, *Ne quicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret.* The wise sages of the world, as to the best things, are fools: (Matt. xi. 25.) "God hath hid these things from the wise and prudent." There are many that are "wise in their own conceits; but there is more hope of a fool than of them," (Prov. xxvi. 12.) So that the greatest part of that which passeth for wisdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quam nihil sapere;* we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir sapiens.* Tully. Those few in the world that are "the children of true wisdom," they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not usually so wise for their souls, and for eternity, as men of this world. (Luke xvi. 8.) "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." It is attended with many inconveniences. (Eccl. i. 18.) "In much wisdom there is much grief:" he speaks of the wisdom about natural things.

But we need not instance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wisdom, which are to be found in good men, in wisdom's own children; the wisdom of God needs not these foils to set it off: the wisdom of man in innocency, or of the highest angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wisdom of God. We mortal men many times mistake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accomplishing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehension of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitness and opposition of them one to another: but the Divine wisdom propounds to itself the highest and best ends, and hath a perfect comprehension of the fitness and unfitness of all things one to another; so that angels are but foolish beings to God. (Job iv. 18.) "His angels he chargeth with folly." Job, upon a full inquiry after wisdom, concludes that it only belongs to God, that he is only perfectly possessed of it. (Job xxviii. 12, &c.) "But where shall wisdom be found, and where is the place of understanding?" In such an eminent and transcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; God only hath it, (ver. 23.) "God knoweth the place thereof."

II. I shall prove that this perfection belongs to God.

1. From the dictates of natural reason; and

2. From Scripture.

1. From the dictates of natural reason. I have often told you the perfections of God are not to be proved by way of demonstration, because there is no cause of them; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wisdom belongs to God. Among men folly is looked upon as the greatest defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and disgrace than vice and wickedness; it is of so ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true esteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedness, the greatest imperfection; and, on the contrary, wisdom is the highest perfection next to holiness and goodness; it is usually more cried up in the world than any thing else. Reason tells us, though the Scripture had not said it, that "wisdom excels folly as much as light doth darkness," (Eccl. ii. 13.) "The wisdom of a man maketh his face to shine," (Eccl. viii. 1.) "Wisdom is a defence," (vii. 12.) and (ver. 19.) "Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men that are in the city."

And the denial of this perfection to God, would argue many other imperfections; it would be an universal blemish to the Divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wisdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power should act without the conduct and direction of infinite wisdom! it would eclipse the providence of God, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the prophet represents God's providence. There can be no counsel, no forecast, no orderly government of the world without wisdom. The goodness, and mercy, and justice, and truth of God, could not shine with that lustre, were it not for his wisdom, which doth illustrate these with so much advantage.

I need not bring testimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expressions of their admiration of God's wise government of the world. I will not trouble you with quotations of particular testimonies. Epicurus, indeed, denied that God either made or governed the world: but he must needs acknowledge him to have been a very wise being, because he made him happy, which cannot be without wisdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wisdom. Aristotle seems to have supposed the world to be a necessary result and emanation from God: but then the other sects of philosophers did suppose the world to be the free product of God's goodness and wisdom.

2. From Scripture; (Job ix. 4.) "He is wise in heart;"—(xxxvi. 5.) "He is mighty in strength and wisdom." (Dan. ii. 20.) "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his." Hither we may refer those texts, which attribute wisdom to God in a singular and peculiar manner; (Rom. xvi. 27.) and those which speak of God as the fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his creatures; (Dan. ii. 21. James i. 5.) and those texts which speak of the wisdom of God in the creation of the world; (Psal. civ. 24.) "O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" (Jer. x. 12.) "Who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched forth the heavens by his discretion;" in the providence and government of the world. (Dan. ii. 20.) "Wisdom and strength are his, and he changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings;" and in many other places, in the redemption of mankind. Therefore Christ is called "the wisdom of God," (1 Cor. i. 24.) and the dispensation of the

gospel, "the hidden wisdom of God, and the manifold wisdom of God," (Eph. iii. 10.)

If then God be only wise, the original and only fountain of it, from thence we learn,

1. To go to him for it: (Jam. i. 5.) "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God." There are many conceited men that think they are rich and increased, and stand in need of nothing. The apostle doth not speak, as if there were some that did not want wisdom, but because there are some so proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; those are stark fools, and God resists such foolish and proud men; but if any man, sensible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to God, "he gives liberally, and upbraids no man." We are ashamed to learn wisdom of men, lest they should contemn and upbraid us with our folly: men are envious and unwilling that others should be as wise as themselves; but God's goodness makes him willing to impart wisdom; "he gives liberally, and upbraids no man."

This is the most desirable accomplishment and perfection; "Happy is the man that getteth wisdom; wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom:" it is better than those things that are of the highest value among men, as Solomon often makes the comparison. Now because "it comes down from above," we should look up for it; it is by the revelation of his will, and the wise counsels of his word, that we are made "wise unto salvation;" therefore we should beg of him, that "he would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself," (Eph. i. 17.)

2. If God be only wise in such an eminent and transcendent degree, then let us be humble. There

is no cause of boasting, seeing "we have nothing but what we have received." The lowest instance, the least specimen of Divine wisdom out shines the highest pitch of human wisdom; "the foolishness of God is wiser than men," (1 Cor. i. 25.) therefore "let not the wise man glory in his wisdom," (Jer. ix. 23.) Of all things we should not be proud of wisdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wisdom, by the way that he would raise it. No such evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wise; *Sapientis animus nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet.*—Cicero. To pride ourselves in our own wisdom, is the way to have our folly made manifest. God threatens to "destroy the wisdom of the wise men," and to "turn their wisdom into foolishness."

3. We should labour to partake of the wisdom of God, so far as it is communicable. The greatest wisdom that we are capable of, is to distinguish between good and evil; "to be wise to that which is good," as the apostle speaks; (Rom. xvi. 19.) that is, to provide for the future in time, to make provision for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive instruction, and to win souls; these are the characters which the Scripture gives of wisdom. When Job had declared, that the excellency of the Divine wisdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wisdom is, which is proper for us: "And unto man he said, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding." There are many that are wise to worldly ends and purposes, as our Saviour tells us; wise to get riches, and to ascend to honours; but this is not the wisdom which we are to labour after; this is

but a short-witted prudence, to serve a present turn without any prospect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wise for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only wise, then put your trust and confidence in him. Whom should we trust rather than infinite wisdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodness and power? In all cases of difficulty trust him for direction; "acknowledge him in all thy ways," that he may direct thy steps; "commit thy way unto the Lord, and lean not to thine own understanding. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but the providence of God disposeth all these things. And if we rely upon our own wisdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as our wisdom is a broken reed, so the wisdom of other men. (Isa. xxxi. 1, 2.) God curseth "them that go down into Egypt, and trust to their strength and wisdom, but look not to the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord: yet he also is wise," saith the prophet.

5. Let us adore the wisdom of God, and say with St. Paul, (1 Tim. i. 17.) "To the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen:" and with Daniel, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his." Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wisdom in men; but the Divine wisdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and blessing, and praise. Thanksgiving respects the benefits we receive; but we bless God when we acknowledge any excellency: for as God's blessing us, is to do us good; so our blessing him,

is to speak good of him: as all God's perfections are the objects of our blessing, so more especially his wisdom is of our praise; for to praise God is to take notice of the wise design and contrivance of his goodness and mercy towards us.

Before I pass on to the other particulars contained in these words, I cannot but take notice, that this wise God here spoken of is styled "our Saviour," which some understand of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were so, it were all one to my purpose, which is in the next place to shew, that glory, and majesty, and dominion, and power, belong to the Divine Being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of Christ, yet, seeing there are so many plain texts in Scripture for the proof of it, we have the less reason to stretch doubtful places; and that this is so, will appear to any one who considers that the title of Saviour is several times in Scripture attributed to God the Father; besides that, in a very ancient and authentic copy, we find the words read somewhat otherwise, and so as to put this out of all controversy, *μόνῳ θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα*, &c.

Having premised thus much for the clearing of these words, I shall briefly consider, first, God's glory and majesty, and then his dominion and sovereignty.

First, God's glory and majesty. By majesty, we may understand the greatness, or eminent excellency of the Divine nature, which results from his perfections, and whereby the Divine nature is set and placed infinitely above all other beings; I say, the eminent excellency of the Divine nature, which re-

sults from his perfections, more especially from those great perfections, his goodness, and wisdom, and power, and holiness.

And his glory is a manifestation of this excellency, and a just acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in Scripture, God is said to be "glorious in power," and "glorious in holiness," and his goodness is called his glory; and here, in the text, glory and majesty are ascribed to him upon the account of his wisdom and goodness.

That these belong to God, I shall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did constantly ascribe greatness to God, and that as resulting chiefly from his goodness, as appears by their frequent conjunction of these two attributes, goodness and greatness; *opt. max.* were their most familiar titles of the Deity; to which I will add that known place of Seneca, *Primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas.*

2. From Scripture. It were endless to produce all those texts wherein greatness and glory are ascribed to God. I shall mention two or three: (Deut. x. 17.) "The Lord is a great God." (Ps. xxiv. 10.) He is called "the King of glory;" (civ. 1.) he is said to be "clothed with majesty and honour." "The whole earth is full of his glory." Hither belong all those doxologies in the Old and New Testament, wherein greatness, and glory, and majesty, are ascribed to God.

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a person great and glorious, and what is the way to majesty; viz. real worth and excellency, and particularly that kind of

excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is goodness; this is that which advanceth a person, and gives him a pre-eminence above all others; this casts a lustre upon a man, and makes his face to shine. Aristotle tells us, that honour is nothing else but the signification of the esteem which we have of a person for his goodness; "For, (saith he) to be good, and to do good, is the highest glory." God's goodness is his highest glory; and there is nothing so glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name: "Ascribe ye greatness to our God, (Deut. xxxii. 3.) "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power," (Psal. xxix. 1.) The glory and majesty of God calls for our esteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we should glorify God in our spirits, by an inward esteem and reverence of his majesty. The thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence; how much more should the apprehensions of the Divine Majesty strike an awe upon our spirits in all our addresses to him! His excellency should make us afraid, and keep us from all saucy boldness and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the distance which is between the majesty of God, and our meanness. And we should "glorify him in our bodies," with outward worship and adoration; that is, by all external significations of reverence and respect; and we should glorify him in our lives and actions. The highest glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour to be like him, *Satis illos coluit, quisquis imitatus est.* Seneca. Hereby we manifest and shew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed

to the Divine perfections. And in case of sin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holiness, who hates sin; and of his justice, which will punish it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is "the glory of God to pass by a provocation."

3. He should take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by ascribing those titles, or that worship, to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reason which is given of the second commandment: "I the Lord am a jealous God." God is jealous of his honour, "and will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images," (Isa. xlii. 8.) Upon this account we find the apostle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, because thereby they debased the esteem of God, and did shew they had unworthy thoughts of him: (Rom. i. 21. 23.) "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations: and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the Divine nature; that is, that he is a Spirit, and so incapable of being represented by any material or sensible image.

Seondly, I come now to speak of the sovereignty and dominion of God: in which I shall shew,

1st, What we are to understand by the sovereignty and dominion of God. By these we mean the full and absolute right, and title, and authority which God hath to and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right results from the effects of that goodness, and power, and wisdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence

there doth accrue to God a sovereign right and title to all his creatures, and a full and absolute authority over them; that is, such a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any superior, nor is subject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *summum imperium*, because there is no power above it to check or control it, and, therefore, there can be no greater than this. And it is absolute, because all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodness, and therefore they owe all possible duty and perpetual subjection so long as they continue in being, because it is solely by his power and goodness that they continue; and, therefore, whatever right or title any one can pretend to any person or thing, that God hath to all things; *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that sovereignty and dominion signifies a full right, and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and an absolute authority over them, to govern them and dispose of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaseth, that is not contrary to his essential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural state and condition of the creature.

And for our better understanding of this, and the preventing of mistakes, which men are apt to fall into about the sovereignty of God, I will shew,

I. Wherein it doth not consist. And,

II. Wherein it doth consist.

I. Wherein it doth not consist.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himself in the extreme misery of innocent and undeserving creatures: I say, not in a right; for the right that God hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obliga-

tions they have to him upon that account. Now, there is none, who, because he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madness, to doubt whether extreme and eternal misery be not a greater evil than simple being is a good. I know they call it physical goodness; but I do not understand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is good or desirable in being, when it only serves to be a foundation of the greatest and most lasting misery? and we may safely say, that the just God will never challenge more than an equitable right. God doth not claim any such sovereignty to himself, as to crush and oppress innocent creatures without a cause, and to make them miserable without a provocation. And because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless jealousies aud unworthy thoughts of God, he hath given us his oath to assure us of the contrary. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live." So far is he from taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be much rather pleased, if sinners would, by repentance, avoid and escape his justice, than that they should fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleased in doing evil to any, where justice doth not require it; nothing is further from infinite goodness, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monster of men, and of a devilish temper, that can do so; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after such a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in imposing laws upon his creatures, which are impossible either to be understood or observed by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the Divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reasonable creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any power to impossibilities.

3. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to necessitate them to sin, or effectually to procure the sins of men, and to punish them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God, so to the nature of a reasonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deserve punishment for what it cannot help. And men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a secret design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot against heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a revenue of glory to his justice. There is no generous and good man, but would spit in that man's face, that should charge him with such a design; and if they who are but very drops of goodness, in comparison of God, the infinite ocean of goodness, would take it for such a reproach, shall we attribute that to the best Being in the world, which we would detest and abominate in ourselves?

II. Wherein the sovereignty of God doth consist.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with, his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the essential perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impose what laws he pleaseth upon his creatures, whether natural and reasonable; or positive, of trial of obedience, provided they contradict not the nature of God, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved punishment in a case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, so the evil he inflicts be short of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it should so seem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may, without injury, take it away again when he pleaseth. In these the sovereignty of God consists; and if there be any thing else that can be reconciled with the essential perfections of God.

2dly, For the proof and confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the heathens, that God is "the Lord and Sovereign of the world, and of all creatures." Hence, Plato calls him τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα; and Tully, *omnium rerum Dominum*, "Lord of all;" and this the Scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him "Lord of all, King of kings, and Lord of lords;" to which we may refer all those doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confession of Nebuchadnezzar, a great king, who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge, that God was "the Most High," (Dan. iv. 34, 35.) I infer,

First, negatively, We cannot, from the sovereignty of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unsuitable to the perfection of his nature; and conse-

quently, that we are to rest satisfied with such a notion of dominion and sovereignty in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of justice and goodness : nay, it would be little less than a horrid and dreadful blasphemy, to say that God can, out of his sovereign will and pleasure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the essential perfections of the Deity ; or to imagine that the pleasure and will of the holy, and just, and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the essential and indispensable laws of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness.

Secondly, positively ; We may infer from the sovereignty and dominion of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for our lord and sovereign, who, by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himself a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmost possibility of our love, to " love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength ;" because the souls that we have he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift ; and when we render these to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable subjection, and observance, and obedience ; and are with all diligence, to the utmost of our endeavours, to conform ourselves to his will, and to those laws which he hath imposed upon us.

4. In case of offence and disobedience, we are, without murmuring, to submit to what he shall inflict upon us, " to accept of the punishment of our iniquity," and " patiently to bear the indignation of the Lord," because we have sinned against him, who is our Lord and Sovereign.

SERMON CXXXVI.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IN THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.—PSALM civ. 24.

I AM treating of the attributes and properties of God, particularly those which relate to the Divine understanding, which I told you are his knowledge and wisdom. I have finished the first, the knowledge of God. The last day I spake concerning the wisdom of God in general; but there are three eminent arguments and famous instances of God's wisdom, which I have reserved for a more large and particular handling. The wisdom of God shines forth in the creation of the world, in the government of it, and in the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ. Of these three I shall speak severally.

I begin with the first, the argument of God's wisdom, which the creation doth furnish us withal. In this visible frame of the world, which we behold with our eyes, which way soever we look, we are encountered with ocular demonstrations of the wisdom of God. What the apostle saith of the power of God is true likewise of his wisdom: (Rom. i. 20.) "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead:" so the eternal wisdom of God is understood by the things which are made. Now the

creation is an argument of the wisdom of God, as it is an effect of admirable counsel and wisdom. As any curious work or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; so the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitness of the works of God, argue the infinite wisdom of Him who made them; a work so beautiful and magnificent, such a stately pile, as heaven and earth is, so curious in the several pieces of it, so harmonious in all its parts, every part so fitted to the service of the whole, and each part for the service of another; is not this a plain argument that there was infinite wisdom in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I shall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things, which we see with our eyes, which we call the world or the creation, is contrived after the best manner, and hath upon it evident impressions of counsel and wisdom. I grant the wisdom of God is infinite, and that many of the ends and designs of his wisdom are "unsearchable, and past finding out," both in the works of creation and providence; and, that "though a wise man seek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he shall not be able to do it;" and we shall never be able to exhaust all the various wisdom and contrivance which is in the works of God; though the oftener and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we shall see to admire in them; the more we study this book of the creation, the more we shall be astonished at the wisdom of the Author: but this doth not hinder but that we may discover something of the wisdom of God, though it be infinite. As the effects of infinite power may fall under our senses, so the designs of infinite wisdom may fall under our reason and understanding; and

when things appear to our best reason plainly to be ordered for the best, and the greatest advantages of the world and mankind, so far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwise, as they might have been a hundred thousand ways, they would not have been so well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwise, is the result of wisdom.

Now the wisdom of God in the creation will appear by considering the works of God. Those who have studied nature, can discourse these things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in astronomy, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in anatomy, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, so it would probably be above most of your capacities; therefore, I shall content myself with some general and more obvious instances of the Divine wisdom, which shines forth so clear in his works, that "he that runs may read it."

1. I shall take a short survey of the several parts of the world.

2. Single out man, the masterpiece of the visible creation.

1. If we survey the world, and travel over the several parts of it in our thoughts, we shall find that all things in it are made with the greatest exactness, ranged in the most beautiful order, and serve the wisest and best ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of that which is most visible, the sun, you see how, by the wise order and constancy of its course, it makes day and night, winter and summer. This the Psalmist takes notice of: (Psal. xix. 1, 2.) "The

heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge." It may easily be imagined, many ways, how the sun might have had another course in reference to the earth; but no man can devise any other, that should not be very much to the prejudice of the world; so that this being the best, it is an argument that wisdom had the ordering and disposing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we shall see gods ascending and descending; I mean clear representations of Divine wisdom in the treasures that are hid in the bowels of it, and those fruits that grow upon the surface of it. What vast heaps, and what variety of useful materials and minerals, are scattered up and down in the earth as one would think with a careless hand, but yet so wisely dispersed, as is most proper for the necessities and uses of several countries! Look upon the surface of the earth, and you shall find it clothed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and usefulness. Look upon the vast ocean, and there you may see the wisdom of God in bridling and restraining that unruly element—I mean, in sinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great measure useless, and incapable of those inhabitants which now possess it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air and sea, and you shall find all these inhabited, and furnished with great store of living creatures of several kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with strong inclination to increase

their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of these creatures armed either with strength or wit to oppose their enemy, or swiftness to fly from him, or strong holds to secure themselves. But the creation is a vast field, in which we may easily lose ourselves. I shall therefore call home our wandering thoughts; for we need not go out of ourselves for a proof of Divine wisdom. I shall therefore,

2. Select the choicest piece of it, man, who is the top and perfection of this visible world. What is said of the elephant, or behemoth, (Job xl. 19.) in respect of the vast bigness and strength of his body, is only absolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, "the chief of the ways of God, and upon earth there is none like him." Man is *mundi utriusque nexus*, "the bond of both worlds," as Scaliger calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of spirits, do meet and unite; for in respect to his body, he is related to this visible world, and is of the earth; but in respect of his soul, he is allied to heaven, and descended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the several representations of God's wisdom, and the several parts of the creation; but we have not yet considered the best piece of the visible world, which we may speak of, without flattery of ourselves, and to the praise of our Maker. God, when he had made the world, "he made man after his own image." When he had finished the other part of the creation, he was pleased to set up this picture of himself in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we shall a little more particularly consider this piece of God's workmanship, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more

excellent than the rest, and, consequently, a higher instance of the Divine wisdom. It is observed by some, that, concerning the parts of the creation, God speaks the word, "Let there be light," and "Let there be a firmament, and there was so:" but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into consultation about him. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion;" (Gen. i. 26.) as if man, above all the rest, were the effect and result of Divine wisdom, and the creature of his counsel.

Man may be considered either in himself, and in respect of the parts of which he consists, soul and body; or with relation to the universe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Consider him in himself, as compounded of soul and body. Consider man in his outward and worse part, and you shall find that to be admirable, even to astonishment; in respect of which, the Psalmist cries out, (Psal. cxxxix. 14.) "I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." The frame of our bodies is so curiously wrought, and every part of it so full of miracle, that Galen (who was otherwise backward enough to the belief of a God), when he had anatomized man's body, and carefully surveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitness and usefulness of every part of it, and the many several intentions of every little vein, and bone, and muscle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And those excellent books of his, *De Usu Partium*, "of the usefulness and convenient contrivance of every part of the body," are a most exact demonstration

of the Divine wisdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, Gassendus saith, the whole work is writ with a kind of enthusiasm. The wisdom of God, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious consideration of the several parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate skill in anatomy, I choose rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unskilfulness to be injurious to the Divine wisdom.

But this *domicilium corporis*, "the house of our body," though it be indeed a curious piece, yet it is nothing to the noble inhabitant that dwells in it. The cabinet, though it be exquisitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely short in value of the jewel, that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reason and understanding exalt us above the rest of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular provision for man, which it hath made for other creatures, because it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reason. Man is not born clothed, nor armed with any considerable weapon for defence; but he hath reason and understanding to provide these things for himself; and this alone excels all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himself warmer and safer; he can foresee dangers, and provide against them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and, by the advantage of his reason, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himself against their violence.

If we consider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there should be at once in our understandings distinct comprehensions of such variety of objects;

that it should pass in its thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things past, and take a prospect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Because we are familiar to ourselves, we cannot be strange and wonderful to ourselves; but the great miracle of the world is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent instance of God's wisdom.

2. Consider man with relation to the universe, and you shall find the wisdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made so useful for man, who was designed to be the chief inhabitant of this visible world, the guest whom God designed principally to entertain in this house which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath so made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himself, and possibly for many other uses than we can imagine; for we much overvalue ourselves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminish the wisdom of God, in restraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the use and service of man; and in reference to this end, you shall find that God hath made abundant and wise provision.

More particularly we will consider man,

1. In his natural capacity as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the service and pleasure, for the use and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little use? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and God has furnished him with many objects to exercise his understanding upon, which would be so far useless and lost, if man were not. Who should observe the motions of the stars, and the courses of those heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature?

Who should pry into the secret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world a creature endowed with reason and understanding? Would the beasts of the field study astronomy, or turn chymists, and try experiments in nature?

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there! which can be imagined to be of little other use but for the pleasure of man. And if man had not been, they would have lost their grace, and been trod down by the beasts of the field, without pity or observation; they would not have made them into garlands and nosegays. How many sorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beasts! and, indeed, they take no pleasure in them. What would all the vast bodies of trees have served for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what use would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of stone? would the mole have admired the fine gold? would the beasts of the forest have built themselves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Consider man in his geographical capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wisdom of God hath so ordered things, that the necessities of every country are supplied one way or other. Egypt hath no rains; but the river Nilus overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the line, where there are excessive heats, every day there are constant gales and breezes of cool wind, to fan and refresh the scorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furnished with materials for silk, a light clothing; we that are cooler here in England, with materials

for cloth, a warmer clothing; Russia and Muscovy, which are extreme cold, are provided with warm furs and skins of beasts.

3. Consider man in his capacity of commerce and intercourse. Man is a sociable creature; besides the advantages of commerce with remoter nations, for supplying every country with those conveniences and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wisdom of God does plainly appear, in disposing the sea into several parts of the world, for the more speedy commerce and intercourse of several nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, that had been needless and superfluous, because they might have been had without commerce; besides that, the great encouragement of intercourse among nations, which is so agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away: if every country had been, as now it is, destitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no sea to give an opportunity of traffic, the world had been very defective as to the use of man. Now here appears the wisdom of God, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the best.

Thus I have endeavoured to do something toward the displaying of God's wisdom in the workmanship of the world, although I am very sensible how much I have been mastered and oppressed by the greatness and weight of so noble an argument. For "who can declare the works of God! and who can shew forth all his praise!"

The use I shall make of what has been said, shall be in three particulars.

1. This confutes the Epicureans, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things

to chance. Those things which are the proper effects of counsel, and bear the plain impression of wisdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madness is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wisest agent upon counsel and design had contrived them; and yet to ascribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be so wisely framed, must pick holes in the creation, and shew some fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any anatomist pretend to shew how the body of man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uses of a reasonable creature, than it is? or any astronomer to rectify the course of the sun? As for the extravagant and blasphemous speech of Alphonsus, "That if he had stood at God's elbow when he made the world, he could have told him how to have made it better;" besides his pride, it shews nothing but his ignorance; that he built his astronomy upon a false hypothesis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that science; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he mistook the frame of it: but those who have been most versed in nature, and have most pried into the secrets of it, have most admired the workmanship both of the great world, and the less.

But if we must suppose the world to be as well made as wisdom could contrive it, which is generally granted, it is a monstrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better say, Archimedes did not make any of his engines by skill, but by chance: and might more easily maintain, that Cardinal Richlieu did not manage affairs by any arts or policy; but they fell out by mere chance. What

pitiful shifts is Epicurus put to, when the best account he can give of the world is this:—"That matter always was, and the parts of it, in motion, and after a great many trials, the parts of matter at length hampered themselves in this fortunate order wherein they now are; that men, at first, grew out of the earth, were nourished by the navel-string, and when they were strong enough, broke loose and weaned themselves; that the nostrils were made by the waters making themselves a passage out of the body; and the stomach and bowels by the waters forcing a passage downward; that the members of the body were not made for those uses for which they serve, but chanced to be so, and the uses afterwards found out." Is it worth the while to advance such senseless opinions as these, to deny the wisdom of God? Is it not much easier, and more reasonable to say, that the wisdom of God made all these things, than to trouble ourselves to imagine how all things should happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly disposition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wisdom and counsel? How long time might a man take to jumble a set of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem: yea, or to make a book of tolerable sense, though but in prose? How long might a man sprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careless hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could much more believe him if he should tell me that Henry the Seventh's chapel in

Westminster was not built by any mortal man, but the stones did grow in those forms into which they seem to us to be cut and graven; that the stones, and timber, and iron, and brass, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themselves into that delicate order, in which we see them so close compacted, that it must be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much easier to imagine how a skilful workman should raise a building, and hew timber, and stones, than how that variety of materials, which is required to a great and stately building, should meet together all of a just bigness, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themselves into that order? I insist the longer upon this, because I am sensible how much atheism hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire, and adore, and praise the wisdom of God, "who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding; who hath made all things in number, weight, and measure;" that is, by exact wisdom. The wise works of God are the proper object of our praise; and this is a day proper for the work of praise and thanksgiving. Now under the gospel, since Christ was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praise and thanksgiving; but as God has given us Christ, so he hath given us our beings. We are not so to remember our Redeemer, as to forget our Creator. The goodness, and power, and wisdom of God, which appears in the creation of the world, ought still to be matter of admiration and praise to Christians. It is a great fault and neglect among Christians, that they are not more taken up with the works of God, and the contem-

plation of the wisdom which shines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vast curious engine of the world, and the great Artificer of all things. It was truly said by one, that most men are so stupid and inconsiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver more than the works of God. There are many that have bestowed more eloquence in the praise of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquisite frame of the world, or any of the other works of God. We can admire the wisdom, and design, and skill of petty artists, and little engineers; but here is wisdom in the beauty and order of the creation. Did we love God, and take pleasure in the effects of his wisdom and power, we should be more in the contemplation of them. (Psal. cxi. 2.) "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein:" let us then say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches," &c.

More particularly let us, with a humble thankfulness, admire the wisdom which hath made and disposed all things so fitly for our use and service, and with so merciful a respect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beasts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Psalmist often praising God upon this account, (Psal. cxxxvi. 4, 5, &c.) The wisdom which hath framed these bodies of ours, (Psal. cxxxix. 14—16.) Which hath endowed us with knowledge and understanding. Elihu complains, that men were apt to overlook these great blessings of God. (Job xxxv. 10—12.) "But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the

night? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven? There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men."

3. Use. Trust the wisdom of God, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wisdom which hath framed thy body in so curious and exquisite a manner, and formed thy spirit within thee, and hath made so many creatures with reference to thy necessity and comfort, trust him for thy future provision. (Matt. vi. 25.) "I say unto you, Take no thought for your lives, what ye shall eat," &c. "Is not the life more than meat? and the body than raiment?" He hath given us our souls; he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made these bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the less? When thou art ready anxiously and solicitously to say, What shall I do for the necessaries of life? consider whence thou didst receive thy life; who made this body of thine; thou mayest be assured, that the wisdom which hath created these, considered how to supply them; the wisdom of God knew that you would want all these, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore "fear not,"

SERMON CXXXVII.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE.

Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.—1 PETER v. 7.

AMONGST the several duties which, towards the conclusion of this Epistle, the apostle exhorts Christians to, this is one—not to be over-much solicitous and concerned about what may befal us, but to refer ourselves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In speaking to this argument, I shall,

I. Consider the nature of the duty here required, which is, to cast our care upon God.

II. The argument used to persuade us to it: because he careth for us.

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word μέριμνα signifies an anxious care about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of mind about what may befal us; about the good that we hope for and desire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the apostle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of God, and his care, all those events which we are apt to be so solicitous and disquieted about. The expression seems to be taken out of Psal. lv. 22. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee."

Now that we may not mistake our duty in this matter, I shall shew what is not here meant by

casting all our care upon God; and then, what is meant by it.

The apostle doth not here intend to take men off from a provident care and diligence about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to reason, but to many express precepts and passages of Scripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the blessing of God, and the good success of our affairs promised thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for those of our family, which cannot be done without some sort of care; and wherein slothfulness and negligence are condemned and threatened with poverty; so that this is not to cast our care upon God, to take no care of ourselves, to use no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we desire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of God, and to cast that burthen upon him, which he expects we should bear ourselves.

But by casting our care upon God, the apostle intends these two things:

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used by us, we should not be farther solicitous, nor trouble ourselves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this, certainly, is our Saviour's meaning, when he bids us "take no care for the morrow." When we have done what is fit for us for the present to do, we should not disquiet and torment ourselves about the issue and event of things.

2. Casting our care upon God, implies, that we should refer the issue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to dispose all things to the best; entirely confiding in his wisdom and goodness, that he will or-

der all things for our good, and in that confidence resolving to rest satisfied and contented with the disposals of his providence, whatever they be.

You see, then, the nature of the duty which the apostle here exhorts to; viz. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used on our parts, we should not be disquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the care of us, and of all our concernments. Which is the

II. Second thing I proposed to speak to, and which I intend chiefly to insist upon; viz. The argument which the apostle here useth to persuade us to this duty, of casting all our care upon God, because it is he that careth for us: and this implies in it these two things:

1. In general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a special care of them and their concerns; "He careth for you." The apostle speaks this to them, not only as men, but as Christians. And thus the Psalmist, from whom these words seem to be taken, does apply and limit this promise; "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us. I shall not now enter upon a large proof of the providence of God; that is too large and intricate an argument for a short discourse, and hath a great

deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and though it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almost generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reason; yet because the vindication of many particular appearances of Providence does, in a great measure, depend upon a full view and comprehension of the whole design, therefore we must necessarily refer ourselves for full satisfaction, as to several difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we shall see God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole design, and then many particular passages, which may now seem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themselves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reason and regularity in them.

Therefore I shall at present only briefly, and in the general, shew that it is very credible, that there is a wise Providence that governs the world, and interests itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events which happen to us.

And I desire it may be observed in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this question concerning Providence, doth suppose the being of God, and that he made the world, as principles already known and granted, before we come to dispute of his providence; for it would be vain to argue about the providence of God, with those who question his being, and whether the world was made by him: but supposing these two principles, that God is, and that he made the world, it is very credible that he should take care of the government of it, and especially of one of the noblest parts of it, the race of mankind. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed so much power and wisdom

in the raising of this great and magnificent pile, and furnishing every part of it with such variety of creatures, so exquisitely and so wisely fitted for the use and service of one another, should, so soon as he had perfected it, forsake his own workmanship, and take no further care of it; especially considering that it is no trouble and disquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpose for the regulating of any disorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wisdom, and power, can do this with all imaginable ease, knows all things, and can do all things, without any disturbance of its own happiness.

And this hath always been the common apprehension of mankind, that God knows all things, and observes every thing that is done in the world, and, when he pleaseth, interposes in the affairs of it. It is true, indeed, the Epicureans did deny that God either made the world or governs it; and, therefore, wise men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of God, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of so odious an opinion, they were content, for fashion sake, to own his being, provided they might take away the best and most substantial arguments for the proof of it. The rest of the philosophers owned a Providence, at least a general Providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not descend to a constant and particular care of every person, and every little event belonging to them: *Interdum curiosus singulorum*, says Tully; "Now and then, when he pleases, he takes care of particular persons, and their lesser concernments;" but many of them thought that God did generally neglect the smaller and more inconsiderable affairs of the world, *Dii*

minora negligunt neque agellos singulorum et viticulas persequuntur, "The gods overlook smaller matters, and do not mind every man's little field and vine." Such imperfect apprehensions had they of the providence of God. And though they would seem hereby to consult the dignity and ease of the Deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of lesser matters, yet, in truth and reality, they cast a dishonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burthen to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness, to take care of every thing.

But now, Divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by assuring us of God's particular care of all persons and events. Our Saviour tells us, that God's providence extends to the least and most inconsiderable creatures; to the grass of the field, "which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven." (Matt. vi. 30.) To the fowls of the air, and that to the least of them, even to the sparrows, two of which are "sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them falleth to the ground" without God. (Matt. x. 29.) Much more doth the providence of God extend to men, which are creatures far more considerable, and to the very least thing that belongs to us, to the very hairs of our head, "which are all numbered;" the lowest instance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more general Providence; and Divine revelation hath rectified those imperfect apprehensions which men had about it, and hath satisfied us, that it extends itself to all particulars, and even to the least things and most inconsiderable. And this is no ways incredible, considering the infinite perfection of the Divine nature, in respect of which, God can with as much and

greater ease take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men, therefore, pray to God for the good they want, and to be freed from the evils they fear, because they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men, therefore, make conscience of their duty, because they believe God observes them, and will reward and punish their good and evil deeds. So that, take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion stands; we rob ourselves of one of the greatest comforts and best refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happiness in the next.

And though there be many disorders in the world, especially in the affairs of man, the most irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a sufficient objection against the providence of God, if we consider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abusing his liberty, and intends this present life for a state of trial in order to another, where men shall receive the just recompence of their actions here; and then if we consider, that many of the evils and disorders which God permits to happen, are capable of being over-ruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to serve wise and excellent purposes, and that the providence of God does sometimes visibly and remarkably interpose, for the prevention and remedy of great disorders and confusions; I say, considering all this, it is no blemish to the Divine Providence, to permit many of those irregularities which are in the world, and suffer the fates of good and bad men to be so cross and unequal in this life. For supposing another life after this,

wherein men shall come to an account, and every man shall receive the just recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper season and full opportunity of setting all things straight, and no man shall have reason then, either to glory in his wickedness, or to complain of his sufferings in this world. This is the first, that God's providence governs the world, and interests itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reason why we should cast our particular cares upon him, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and especial care of them. The apostle speaks this to Christians, "Cast all your care upon him, for he careth for you." And this David limits in a more particular manner to good men: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

The providence of God many times preserves good men from those evils which happen to others, and, by a peculiar and remarkable interposition, rescues them out of those calamities which it suffers others to fall into; and God many times blesseth good men with remarkable prosperity and success in their affairs. To which purpose there are innumerable declarations and promises in the Holy Scriptures, so well known, that I shall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithstanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are harassed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of God usually ordereth it so, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find

great comfort and support under them, and make better use and improvement of them than others; so that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the apostle assures us, (Rom. viii. 28.) "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." All the evils and afflictions which happen to good men, conspire one way or other to the promoting of their happiness, many times in this world, to be sure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the same apostle tells us, (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.) "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not," &c. And can we say God's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal sufferings with eternal glory? when, through many hardships and tribulations, he at last brings us to a kingdom? Was Joseph neglected by God, when, by a great deal of hard usage and a long imprisonment, he was raised to the highest dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather, was not the providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making those sufferings so many steps to his glory, and the occasion of his advancement? And is not God's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulation and sufferings; and making "our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?"

Thus you see what is implied in God's care of us in general; that he governs the world, and disposeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more especial care of them. Let us now see of what force this

consideration is, to persuade to the duty enjoined in the text, to cast all your care upon God; that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been used on our part, not to be anxious and solicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this consideration, that God cares for us, should be an argument to us, to cast all our care upon him, upon these two accounts:

1. Because if God cares for us, our concernments are in the best and safest hands.

2. Because all our anxiety and solicitude will do us no good.

1. Because if God cares for us, our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and where we should desire to have them; infinitely safer than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great satisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all disquieting thoughts: for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are sure that nothing shall happen to us, but by the disposal or permission of infinite wisdom and goodness. There are many things, indeed, which to us seem chance and accident; but in respect of God, they are providence and design; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of second causes, but they are all wisely designed; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the result of the deepest counsel, and the greatest goodness. And can we wish that we and our concernments should be in better or safer hands, than of infinite power and wisdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodness? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean ourselves towards God as we ought, we may rest assured of his love and care of us; and if we do in

good earnest believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to those that love and serve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can and will dispose them better for us, than we could manage them ourselves, if we were left to ourselves, and our affairs were put into the hands of our own counsel.

Put the case we had the entire ordering and disposal of ourselves, what were reasonable for us to do in this case? We would surely, according to our best wisdom and judgment, do the best we could for ourselves; and when, upon experience of our own manifold ignorance and weakness, we had found our weightiest affairs and designs frequently to miscarry, for want of foresight, or power, or skill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and disappointments which human affairs are liable to, we should then look about us; and if we knew any person much wiser, and more powerful than ourselves, who we believed did heartily love us, and wish well to us, we would out of kindness to ourselves, ask his counsel in our affairs, and crave his assistance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wisdom and good-will to us.

Now God is such an one; he loves us as well as we do ourselves, and desires our happiness as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are most conducing to it, and will most effectually secure it. And every man that believes thus of God (as every man must do, that believes there is a God, for these are the natural and essential notions which all men have of the Deity); I say, every man that

believes thus of God, the first thing he would do (if he knew not already that God had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himself to God, and to beseech him with all earnestness and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments to him, and be pleased to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himself wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to dispose of him as to him should seem best.

Now if God have prevented us herein, and without our desire taken this care upon himself, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greatest happiness that could possibly have befallen us; and we should, without any farther care and anxiety, using our own best diligence, and studying to please him, cheerfully leave ourselves in his hands, with the greatest confidence and security, that he will do all that for us which is really best; and with a firm persuasion that that condition, and those circumstances of life which he shall choose for us, will be no other but the very same which we would choose for ourselves, if we were as wise as he.

And it is so natural for men to think thus of God, that the very heathen poet had the same idea of him, and upon that ground, adviseth us to commit all our concernments to him.

Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior est illis homo, quam sibi.

"Leave it (says he) to the wiser gods, to consider and determine what is fittest for thee, and most for

thy advantage; and though they do not always give thee what thou desirest, and that which pleaseth thee best, yet they will give that which is most fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himself." Not much different from this, is the Divine counsel of Solomon: (Prov. iii. 5, 6.) "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." It is considerable who it is that gives this advice: the wisest of the sons of men; and yet he adviseth to trust in God for direction, and not to lean to our understandings.

If, therefore, we be fully persuaded of God's infinitely wise and good providence, we ought certainly to refer ourselves to him, and perfectly to acquiesce in his disposal, and to rest satisfied in whatever he does; and whatever condition he assigns to us, we ought to be contented with it; if we be not, we find fault with his wisdom, and reproach his goodness, and wish the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of God, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, so would it likewise silence all those murmurings and discontents, which are apt to arise in us when things fall out cross to our desires, when disasters and disappointments happen to us, and the providence of God casts us into sickness, or poverty, or disgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befel him: "I held my peace, (says he) and spake not a word, because thou, Lord, didst it." And this, likewise, should keep us from fretting and vexing at instruments and

second causes; to consider that the wise providence of God over-ruleth and disposeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permission. This consideration restrained David's anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he followed him, reproaching him, and cursing him; "Let him alone; the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." He considered that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from a higher hand, this calmed his passion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the street, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience: but no man is in a passion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity soever befalleth us, when we consider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will still and hush our passion, and make us, with Eli, to hold our peace, or only to say, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good."

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and restraint, and the loss of our friends and near relations; and these are great afflictions, and very cross and distasteful to us; and, therefore, when we are in danger of any of these, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befal us, we are prone to censure the providence of God, and to judge rashly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the best. But we should consider, that we are very ignorant and short-sighted creatures, and see but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the designs of God, and to

look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as Solomon expresseth it) see the work of God from the beginning to the end; whereas, if we saw the whole design of Providence together, we should strangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and should see it to be very wise and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the last issue and result of things, is most for our good, is certainly best, how grievous soever it may seem for the present. Sickness caused by physic, is, many times, more troublesome for the present, than the disease we take it for; but every wise man composeth himself to bear it as well as he can, because it is in order to his health; the evils and afflictions of this life are the physic and means of cure, which the providence of God is often necessitated to make use of; and if we did trust ourselves in the hands of this great Physician, we should quietly submit to all the severities of his providence, in confidence that they would all "work together for our good."

When children are under the government of parents, or the discipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied so many things which they desire, and to be constrained by severities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the master know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconsiderateness which makes them to think so, and that when they come to years, and to understand themselves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them so much discontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childishness and folly which made them to think otherwise, and that they had, in all probability, been undone, had they been indulged

in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and consideration enough to trust the discretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even those things which were so displeasing to them, would at last tend to their good.

There is a far greater distance between the wisdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant and childish in respect of God, than our children are in respect of us; and being persuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and discipline, it is necessary for our good, that we be restrained in many things, which we eagerly desire: and suffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and "have put away childish thoughts," and are come to understand things as they truly are, and not "in a riddle," and darkness, as we now do; then "the judgment of God will break forth as the light, and the righteousness of all his dealings as the noonday;" then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we shall see a plain reason for all those dispensations which were so much stumbled at, and acknowledge the great wisdom and goodness of them.

You see, then, what reason there is to refer ourselves to the providence of God, and to "cast all our care upon him," to trust him with the administration and disposal of our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to please him, every thing in the issue will turn to the best for us; and therefore, we should not anxiously trouble ourselves about the events of things, but resign up ourselves to the good pleasure of Him,

who disposeth all things "according to the counsel of his will," entirely trusting in his goodness, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us for the best, referring the success of all our concernments to him, "in whose hands are all the ways of the children of men," cheerfully submitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every case.

And this is a proper expression of our confidence in God's wisdom and goodness, to refer things to him before the event, and to say with the Christians, (Acts xxi. 14.) "The will of the Lord be done;" because this shews that we are persuaded that God will do better for us, than our own counsel and choice; and to submit to his will after the event, is likewise a great instance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: for when God, by his providence, declares his will in any case, we should look upon it as the sentence of a wise and just judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Christians, who have much greater assurance of the particular providence of God, than the heathens had; and yet some of them were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this consideration, Epictetus (as Arrian tells us) would express himself thus: "I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which God wills, than that which I should will." And again, "Lift up thine eyes (says he) with confidence to God, and say, Henceforth, Lord, deal with me as thou pleasest; ὁμιογνωμόνῶ σοι, ἴσος εἰμί· I am of the same opi-

nion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art I refuse nothing that seems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; clothe me with what garments thou pleasest: set me in a public place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty, which of these thou pleasest; ἐγώ σοι ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων τούτων πρὸς ἀνθρωπους ἀπολογήσομαι. If men shall censure this providence towards me, and say, Thou dealest hardly with me; I will apologize for thee, I will undertake and maintain thy cause, that what thou dost is best for me." What could a Christian say more or better, by way of resignation of himself to the providence of God? It almost transports me to read such passages from a heathen, especially if we consider in what condition Epictetus was; he had a maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity of poverty, a slave, and cruelly and tyrannically used, so that we can hardly imagine a man in worse and more wretched circumstances; and yet he justifies the providence of God in all this, and not only submits to his condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it; and since God hath thought it fittest and best for him, he is of the same mind, and thinks so too. I confess, it doth not move me to hear Seneca, who flowed with wealth, and lived at ease, to talk magnificently, and to slight poverty and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trouble: but to see this poor man, in the lowest condition, and worst circumstances of humanity, bear up so bravely, and with such a cheerfulness and serenity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and this not out of stupidity, but from a wise sense of the providence of God, and a firm persua-

sion of the wisdom and goodness of all his dealings, this, who can choose but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a Christian, much more for a heathen! To which we may apply that saying of our Lord, concerning the heathen centurion, "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;" so wise, so equal, so firm a temper of mind is seldom to be found, no, not amongst Christians. And this is the first consideration, that if God cares for us, we and our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and therefore we should cast all our care upon God. The

Second is, Because all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own spirits, and make them restless, in the contemplation of the evils and disappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miserable, in the sad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, control the course of things, and alter the designs of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, overrule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our Saviour useth to this very purpose: (Matt. vi. 27.) "Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?" So that all this trouble is unreasonable, and to no purpose, because it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and disposed by a higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate, and contrive, and use our best endeavours for the effecting of our designs, but we cannot secure the event against a thousand interpositions of Divine providence, which we can neither foresee nor hinder; but yet, not-

withstanding, these our endeavours are reasonable, because they are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miscarry, yet they are all we can do: but after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the event is the vainest thing in the world, because it is to no purpose, nor doth at all conduce to what we desire; "we disquiet ourselves in vain," and we distrust God's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and disappoint us.

Let us then, by these considerations, be persuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and universal use in the whole course of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have used our best endeavours, let us sit down and be satisfied, and refer the rest to God, whose providence governs the world, and takes care of all our interests, and of the interest of his church and religion, when they seem to be in greatest danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very reasonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore understands best how to order them. The government of the world is a very curious and complicated thing, and not to be tampered with by every unskilful hand; and, therefore, as an unskilful man, after he hath tampered a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at last convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it to mend it, and put it into order; so must we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concernments, or the public state of things; we must give over governing the world, as a business past our skill, as a province too hard, and

" a knowledge too wonderful for us," and leave it to him, who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and disposed, we do not believe the providence of God, whatever profession we make of it ; if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious care and discontent. Were we firmly persuaded of the wisdom and goodness of the Divine providence, we should confidently rely upon it, and, according to the apostle's advice here in the text, " cast all our care upon him, because he careth for us."

SERMON CXXXVIII.

THE WISDOM OF GOD IN THE REDEMPTION OF MANKIND.

Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.—1 Cor. i. 24.

I HAVE, in the ordinary course of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of God; more particularly those which relate to the Divine understanding—the knowledge and wisdom of God. The first of these I have finished; and made some progress in the second, the wisdom of God: which I have spoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to consider those famous instances and arguments of the Divine wisdom, in the creation of the world; the government of it; and the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ. The two first of these I have spoken to; namely, the wisdom of God, which appears in the creation and government of the world. I come now to the

Third instance of the Divine wisdom, the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ; which I shall, by God's assistance, speak to from these words, "Christ the wisdom of God."

The apostle, in the beginning of this Epistle, upon occasion of his mentioning the divisions and parties that were among the Corinthians, where one said, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" asks them, whether "Paul was crucified for them?" or,

whether "they were baptized in the name of Paul?" To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verses, that he had not so much as baptized any of them, except two or three; so far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verse, he says, that his work, his principal work, was "to preach the gospel," which he had done, not with human elequence, "not in wisdom of words," but with great plainness and simplicity, "lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect;" lest, if he should have used any artifice, the gospel should have been less powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain; and, therefore, the gospel did seem to very many to be a foolish and ridiculous thing. The story which they told of Christ crucified, was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the gentiles foolishness." The Jews, who expected another kind of Messias, that should come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the story of a crucified Christ. The Greeks, the philosophers, who expected some curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and simple relation of Christ, and of the gospel.

But though this design of the gospel appeared silly and foolish to rash, and inconsiderate, and prejudiced minds; yet "to them that are called," to them that do believe, "both Jews and gentiles, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God;" Christ, that is, the way of our redemption by Jesus Christ, which the apostle preached, "the wisdom of God," an eminent instance of it.

So that the redemption of man by Jesus Christ, is a design of admirable wisdom. This I shall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general testimonies of Scripture. And,

II. By a more particular inquiry into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplished.

I. By the testimonies from Scripture. You know I have all along, in my discourses of the attributes of God, used this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of Scripture: but now I must forsake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wisdom of the creation is manifest in "the things which are made; the heavens declare the glory of God's wisdom, and the firmament shews his handy-work." The works of God do preach and set forth the wisdom of the Creator; but the sun, moon, and stars, do not preach the gospel. The wisdom of redemption is wisdom in a mystery, hidden wisdom, which none of the princes or philosophers of this world knew. The sharpest wits, and the highest and most raised understandings amongst the heathens, could say nothing of this. Here the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the prudent, is posed, and we may make the apostle's challenge, (ver. 20. of this chapter,) "Where is the wise? where is the disputer of this world?" There is no natural light discovers Christ; the wise men cannot find him out, unless a star be created on purpose to lead and direct to him. Therefore, in this, I shall only depend upon Divine revelation. (1 Cor. ii. 7, 8.) The gospel is called "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the

princes of this world knew." (Eph. i. 7, 8.) "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence." (Eph. iii. 10, 11.) "The manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." This work of our redemption by Jesus Christ, is so various and admirable, that it is not below the angels to know and understand it; "To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wisdom of God."

II. By inquiring more particularly into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplished. This is wisdom, to fit means to ends; and the more difficult the end, the greater wisdom is required to find out suitable and sufficient means for the accomplishment of the end. Now the wisdom of redemption will appear, if we consider the case of fallen man, and what fit, and proper, and suitable means the wisdom of God hath devised for our recovery.

First, Let us consider the case of fallen man, which was very sad, both in respect of the misery and the difficulty of it.

1. In respect of the misery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by God, having, by his voluntary transgression, and wilful disobedience, fallen from him, did presently sink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miserable and cursed condition, of which heaven, and earth, and his own conscience, bore him witness. Man being become a sinner, is not only deprived of the image of God, but is liable to his justice; here was his misery.

2. The difficulty of the case was this; man could not recover himself and raise himself out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; so that our help is only in God; and, indeed, he is a merciful God, and doth not desire our ruin, nor delight in our destruction: but suppose his mercy never so willing to save us, will not his holiness, and justice, and truth, check those forward inclinations of his goodness, and hinder all the designs of his mercy? Is not sin contrary to the holy nature of God? Hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? Hath not he threatened it with heavy and dreadful punishment? and said, that the sinner shall die, that he will not acquit the guilty, nor let sin go unpunished? Should he now, without any satisfaction to his offended justice, pardon the sinner, remit his punishment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeable to his holiness, and justice, and truth? Would this become the wise governor of the world, who loves righteousness and order; who hates sin, and is obliged, by the essential rectitude of his nature, to discountenance sin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of God. The mercy of God pities our misery, and would recover us, would open paradise to us: but there is a flaming sword that keeps us out; the incensed justice of God, that must be satisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally ruined; if he spares us, how shall "mercy and justice meet together?" how shall God at once express his love to the sinner, and his hatred to sin? Here is the difficulty of our case.

Secondly, Let us now inquire what means the wisdom of God useth for our recovery. The wisdom of God hath devised this expedient to accommodate

all these difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and justice of God. The Son of God shall undertake this work, and satisfy the offended justice of God, and repair the ruined nature of man. He shall bring God and man together, and make up this gulf, and renew the commerce and correspondence between God and us, which was broken off by sin. The work that God designs, is the redemption of man; that is, his recovery from a state of sin and eternal death, to a state of holiness and eternal life. The Son of God is to engage in this design of our redemption, to satisfy the offended justice of God towards us, so as to purchase our deliverance from the wrath to come, and so as to restore us to the image and favour of God, that we may be sanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will consider,

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work.

2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it.

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work, and that was the "eternal Son of God;" who, in respect of his infinite wisdom and power, the dignity and credit of his person, his dearness to his Father, and interest in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between God and man.

2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it; and these I shall refer to two heads, his humiliation, and exaltation. All the parts of these are very subservient to the design of our redemption.

I. The humiliation of Christ, which consists of three principal parts; his incarnation, his life, and his death.

1. His incarnation, which is set forth in Scripture by several expressions; his being "made flesh, and dwelling among us;" (John i. 14.) His being "made of the seed of David according to the flesh;" (Rom. i. 3.) His being "made of a woman;" (Gal. iv. 4.) The "manifestation of God in the flesh;" (1 Tim. iii. 16.) His "taking part of flesh and blood;" (Heb. ii. 14.) His "taking on him the seed of Abraham," and "being made like unto his brethren;" (Heb. ii. 16, 17.) His "coming in the flesh;" (1 John ii. 2.) All which signifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as God. The eternal Son of God, in the fulness of time, took our nature; that is, assumed a real soul and body into union with the Divine nature. Now this person, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle person to interpose in this difference, and take up this quarrel between God and man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both parties, and interested both in the honour of God, and the happiness of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by such ways as might be consistent with the other.

More particularly, his incarnation did fit him for those two offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of prophet and priest.

(1.) The office of prophet, to teach us both by his doctrine and his life.

By his doctrine. His being in the likeness of man; this made him more familiar to us. He was "a prophet raised up from among his brethren," as Moses spake, and he makes this an argument why

we should hear him. Should God speak to us immediately by himself, we could not hear him, and live. God condescends to us, and complies with the weakness of our nature, and "raiseth up a prophet from among our brethren;" we should hear him. And then his being God, did add credit and authority to what he spake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his life, I shall have occasion to speak presently.

(2.) For the office of priest. He was fit to be our priest, because "he was taken from among men," as the apostle speaks; fit to suffer, as being man, having a "body prepared," as it is, Heb. x. 5. and fit to satisfy, by his sufferings, for the sins of all men, as being God, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the sufferings of an infinite person, being equal to the offences done against an infinite God: and thus the mercy of God is exalted without the diminution of his justice.

And as his incarnation did qualify him for suffering, so for compassion, and fellow-suffering with us: (Heb. ii. 17, 18.) "Wherefore, in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."

2. His life was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holiness and goodness. I might go through all the parts of it; but because I intend to be very short upon these heads, I shall only take notice of that part of his life, which was spent in his public ministry; "he went about doing good;" the doc-

trine that he preached was calculated for the destroying of sin, and the promoting of holiness; the great end and design of it was to advance righteousness, and goodness, and humility, and patience, and self-denial; to make us mortify our sensual desires, and brutish passions, to contemn and renounce this present world; and this being the design of it, it was a most proper engine to demolish the works of the devil: and to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine, the whole frame of his life, and all the circumstances of it, did contribute. His life was the practice of his doctrine, and a clear comment upon it. The meanness of his condition in the world, that he had no share of the possessions of it, was a great advantage to his doctrine of self-denial, and contempt of the world. "The Captain of our salvation," that he might draw off our affections from the world, and shew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himself have no share in it; (Matt. viii. 20.) "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." The mean circumstances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his design; for had he not been stripped of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been so free from suspicion of a worldly interest and design; nay, he could not have been so considerable; he was really greater for his meanness. The very heathens did account this true greatness (as we find in Aristotle), not to admire the pleasures, and greatness, and pomp of the world. And that his meanness might be no disadvantage to him, those evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him considerable, and gained more reverence and authority to his

doctrine, than his meanness could bring contempt upon it.

Besides, the manner of his conversation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very sweet, and conversable, and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himself to them in the most humane ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought, did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a Divine testimony, and setting the seal of God to the truth of it; yet, because many were blinded with prejudice, and though they did see, yet would not see, "Christ, the wisdom of God," did so order the business of his miracles, to make them human ways of winning upon them, for they were generally such as were beneficial; "he healed all manner of diseases" and maladies by this miraculous power; and so his miracles, did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were benefits; this was a sensible demonstration to them, that he intended them good, because he did them good; they would easily believe that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their souls. This for his life.

3. His death, which was the lowest step of his humiliation, and the consummation of his sufferings. Now the death of Christ did eminently contribute to this design of our redemption. The death of Christ did not only expiate the guilt of sin, and pacify conscience, by making plenary satisfaction to the Divine justice, but did eminently contribute to the killing of sin in us: (Rom. vi. 6.) "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the

body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin." (Rom. viii. 3.) "God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin (that is, by being a sacrifice for sin) condemned sin in the flesh." The death of Christ convinceth sin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, because the impartial justice of God did so severely punish it in his own Son, when he appeared in the person of a sinner; and this is the most powerful argument to us to crucify sin, that it crucified our Saviour. That so innocent and holy a person should suffer so cruel and ignominious a death for our sins, should set us for ever against it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of Christ's sufferings, are with admirable wisdom fitted for the conquering of sin and Satan. Sin came by the woman: the "seed of the woman" suffers for sin; and by suffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our Saviour began his sufferings for sin. Sin came by the tree; and Christ bears the curse of it in hanging upon the tree, and crucifies it by his cross.

And as he conquered sin, so he overcame Satan by his own arts. The devil found Christ in the likeness of man, he judged him mortal, and his great design was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. Christ permits him to bring about his design: he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great stone upon it: but here his Divine wisdom appears, in ruining the devil by his own design, and "snaring him in the works of his own hands." (Heb. ii. 14.) "By death he destroys him that had the power of death; that is, the devil."

I know the sufferings of Christ were, by the wise

of the world, made the great objection against the wisdom of this dispensation; the "cross of Christ was to the Greeks foolishness;" and yet the wisest of them had determined otherwise in general, though not in this particular case. Plato (in the second book of his Commonwealth) saith, "That a man may be a perfect pattern of justice and righteousness, and be approved by God and men, he must be stripped of all the things of this world; he must be poor and disgraced, and be accounted a wicked and unjust man; he must be whipped, and tormented, and crucified as a malefactor;" which is, as it were, a prophetical description of our Saviour's sufferings. And Arrian, in his Epict. describing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls the apostle, the messenger, the preacher, and minister of God, saith, "He must be without house and harbour, and worldly accommodations; must be armed with such patience for the greatest sufferings, as if he were a stone, and devoid of sense; he must be a spectacle of misery and contempt of the world." So that by the acknowledgment of these two wise heathens, there was nothing in the sufferings of Christ that was unbecoming the wisdom of God, and improper to the end and design of Christ's coming into the world; besides, that they served a further end, which they did not dream of, the satisfying of Divine justice.

Secondly, His exaltation. The several parts of which, his resurrection, and ascension, and "sitting at the right hand of God," were eminently subservient to the perfecting and carrying on of his design.

The resurrection of Christ, is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered: (Rom. i. 4.) "Declared to be the Son of God with power,

ὁρισθέντος υἱοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει, by the resurrection from the dead." This great miracle of his resurrection from the dead did determine the controversy, and put it out of all doubt and question, that he was the Son of God. And then his ascension, and "sitting at the right hand of God," this gives us the assurance of a blessed immortality, and is a demonstration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlasting glory and happiness. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, than the assurance of eternal life and happiness?

And then the consequents of his exaltation, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The sending of the Holy Ghost "to lead us into all truth," to sanctify us, to assist us, and to comfort us under the greatest troubles and afflictions; and the powerful intercession of Christ in our behalf, and his return to judgment; the expectation whereof, is the great argument to repentance, and holiness of life: (Acts xvii. 30, 31.) "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." And thus I have endeavoured to prove, that the redemption of man by Jesus Christ, is a design of admirable wisdom.

The use I shall make of it, is to convince us of the unreasonableness of unbelief, and the folly and madness of impenitency.

First, The unreasonableness of unbelief. The gospel reveals to us the wise counsel and dispen-

sation of God for our redemption; and those who disbelieve the gospel, they "reject the counsel of God against themselves," as it is said of the unbelieving pharisees and lawyers, (Luke vii. 30.) The gospel reveals to us a design so reasonable and full of wisdom, that they who can disbelieve it are desperate persons, devoted to ruin. (1 Cor. i. 18.) "The cross of Christ is to them that perish foolishness." (2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.) "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The gospel carries so much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but such whose eyes are blinded by the devil and their lusts.

He that will duly weigh and consider things, and look narrowly into this wise dispensation of God, shall find nothing to object against it; nay, shall discover in it the greatest motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reasonable, especially if it be for our advantage. Now this wise dispensation of God is not only reasonable in itself, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our understandings, and satisfy our interest; why should we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The design of the gospel is reasonable, and gratifies our understandings. And in this respect, the gospel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety, and holiness, and real goodness among men; and the more any religion advanceth these, the more reasonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the Divine nature; fear of punishment, and hopes

of pardon and rewards. Now the gospel represents all these to the greatest advantage.

1. It represents the perfections of God to the greatest advantage, especially those which tend most to the promotion of piety, and the love of God in us; his justice and mercy.

(1.) His justice. The gospel represents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any case let sin go unpunished. The impartiality of the Divine justice appears in this dispensation, that when God pardons the sinner, yet he will punish sin so severely in his own Son, who was the surety. Now, what could more tend to discountenance sin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His mercy. This dispensation is a great demonstration of the mercy, and goodness, and love of God, in sending his Son to die for sinners, and in saving us by devoting and sacrificing him: (John iii. 16.) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." (Rom. v. 8.) "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us." (1 John iv. 9, 10.) "In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now this representation of God's mercy and love, which the gospel makes, is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to God.

2. The second argument to piety, is fear of punishment. The gospel hath revealed to us the misery of those who continue in their sin; it hath made clear and terrible discoveries of those torments which attend sinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treasures of God's wrath; so that now, under

the gospel, "hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering;" and this is one thing which makes the gospel so powerful an engine to destroy sin: (Rom. i. 16. 18.) "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the gospel the most powerful instrument to take men off from sin, and engage them to holiness, that can be imagined. The means to draw men from sin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, are hopes of pardon and mercy, and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from sin, the gospel promises pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holiness, the gospel opens heaven to us, and sets before us everlasting glory and happiness, and gives us the greatest assurance of it.

This is the first, the design of the gospel is reasonable, in that it does eminently and directly serve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This dispensation of God is beneficial to us, and satisfies our interest; and this adds to the unreasonableness of our unbelief, this design of God being not only reasonable in itself, but desirable to us that it should be so; because of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The design of the gospel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominion of sin, and the tyranny of Satan; to restore us to the image and favour of God; and by making us partakers of a Divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not desirable to every man, that there should be a way whereby our

guilty consciences may be quieted and appeased; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell? Is it not desirable to be freed from the slavery of our lusts, and rescued from the tyranny and power of the great destroyer of souls? Is it not desirable to be like God, and to be assured of his love and favour, who is the best friend, and the most dangerous enemy; and to be secured, that, when we leave this world, we shall be unspeakably happy for ever? Now the gospel conveys these benefits to us; and if this be the case of the gospel, and there be nothing in this design of our redemption, but what is wise and reasonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage, why should any man be so averse to the belief of it? Why should unbelief be counted a piece of wit? Is it wit to set ourselves against reason, and to oppose our best interest? It is wickedness, and prejudice, and inconsiderateness, which disbelieves the gospel: those who do consider things welcome this good news, and embrace these glad tidings. Wisdom is justified of her children. To them who are truly sensible of their own interest, and willing to accept of reasonable evidence, this is not only a true saying, but worthy of all acceptation; that "Christ came into the world to save sinners."

Secondly, This doth convince men of the madness and folly of impenitency. Now, since the wisdom of God hath contrived such a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of God's wrath and displeasure against sin, hath given us such arguments to repentance, and by discovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us such encouragement to repentance, how great must the folly of impenitency be? For consider,

1. That impenitency directly sets itself against the wisdom of God. If after all this we continue in our

sins, we reject the counsel of God against ourselves, we despise the wisdom of God and charge that with folly: and we do it against ourselves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our sins, and cherish our lusts, we directly oppose the end of our redemption, we contradict the great design of the gospel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of God's wisdom, who sent his Son into the world on purpose to destroy sin; for we uphold that which he came to destroy: (1 John iii. 5.) "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins." Now shall we continue in sin, when we know the Son of God was manifested to take away sin? God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out the riches of his wisdom in this design, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to God, and injurious to ourselves; it is such a madness, as if a condemned man should despise a pardon; as if a prisoner should be fond of his fetters, and refuse deliverance; as if a man desperately sick should fight with his physician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the wisdom of God, which hath contrived our recovery, "we forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great salvation; we love death, and hate our own souls," (Prov. viii. 34—36.)

2. Consider, we cannot expect the wisdom of God should do more for our recovery, than hath been already done; the wisdom of God will not try any further means. (Matt. xxi. 37.) "Last of all he sent his Son." If we despise this way, if we "tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified, an unholy thing, there would remain no more sacrifice for sin," (Heb. x. 26. 29.) What can expiate the guilt of sin, if the blood of Christ do not? What shall take us

off from sin, what shall sanctify us, if the blood of the covenant be ineffectual? We resist our last remedy, and make void the best means the wisdom of God could devise for our recovery, if, after the revelation of the gospel, we continue in our sins.

3. If we frustrate this design of God's wisdom for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dreadful and certain. Impenitency under the gospel will increase our misery. If Christ had not come, we had had no sin, in comparison of what we now have; but now our sin remains, and there is no cloak for our sin, προφάσιν οὐκ ἔχουσιν. We shall not be able at the day of judgment to preface any thing, by way of excuse or apology, for our impenitency. What shall we be able to say to the justice of God, when that shall condemn us, who rejected his wisdom, which would have saved us? We would all be saved, but we would be saved without repentance: now the wisdom of God hath not found out any other way to save us from hell, but by saving us from our sins. And thou that wilt not submit to this method of Divine wisdom, take thy course, and let us see how thou wilt escape the damnation of hell. I will conclude all with those dreadful words which the wisdom of God pronounceth against those that despise her, and refuse to hearken to her voice: (Prov. i. 24—26.) "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." They who will not comply with the counsel of God for their happiness, they shall inherit the condition which they have chosen to themselves; "they shall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices."

SERMON CXXXIX.

THE JUSTICE OF GOD IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?—GEN. xviii. 25.

IN treating of the attributes of God, I have considered those which relate to the Divine understanding; viz. knowledge and wisdom. I come now to consider those which relate to the Divine will; viz. these four—the justice, the truth, the goodness, and the holiness of God. I begin with the first; namely, the justice of God.

At the 17th verse of this chapter, God, by a great and wonderful condescension of his goodness, reveals to Abraham his intention concerning the destruction of Sodom; upon this Abraham, (ver. 23.) interceded with God for the saving of the righteous persons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with God his justice and righteousness, with which he apprehended it to be inconsistent to "destroy the righteous with the wicked;" which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general destruction. "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far

from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" that is, undoubtedly he will. This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that, in the distribution of rewards and punishments, the Judge of the world will do righteously.

So that the argument that lies under our consideration, is the justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments; for the clearing of which, we will consider it,

First, In hypothesi, in regard to the particular case which is here put by Abraham in the text.

Secondly, In thesi, we will consider it in general, in the distribution of rewards and punishments.

First, We will consider it in hypothesi, in regard to the particular case which is here put by Abraham in the text; and the rather, because, if we look well into it, there is something of real difficulty in it, not easy to be cleared; for Abraham's reasoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the destruction of Sodom, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the same common destruction. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" as if he had said, Surely the Judge of all the earth will never do so unrighteous a thing.

And yet, notwithstanding this, we see it is very usual for the providence of God to involve good

men in general calamities, and to make no visible difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile these appearances of providence with this reasoning of Abraham in the text.

And for doing of this, I see but one possible way, and that is this; that Abraham does not here speak concerning the judgments of God, which befal men in the ordinary course of his providence, which many times happen promiscuously, and involve good and bad men in the same ruin; and the reason hereof is plain, because God in his ordinary providence does permit the causes, which produce these judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either cannot or will not make any distinction; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two sorts of causes, either those which we call natural, or those which are voluntary. Natural causes, such as wind, and thunder, and storms, and the infection of the air, and the like: these, acting by a necessity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, can make no distinction between the good and bad. And the voluntary causes of calamities, as men are, they many times will make no difference between the righteous and the wicked. Nay, many times they are maliciously bent against the righteous, and the effects of their malice fall heaviest upon them. Now, we say, that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when natural causes are permitted to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes are left to their liberty; and, therefore, in the course of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected that such a distinction should be made; it is neither possible, nor does justice require it: it

is not possible, supposing natural causes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes to be left to their liberty; nor does justice require it, for every man is so much a sinner, that no evil that befals him in this world, can be said to be unjust in respect of God.

So that Abraham is not here to be understood, as speaking of such judgments as befal men in the ordinary course of God's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, nor is there any injustice in it; but Abraham here speaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the punishment of some crying sins, and the example of the world to deter others from the like. And such was this judgment, which God intended to bring upon Sodom, and which Abraham hath relation to in this discourse of his. In this case, it may be expected from the justice of God, that a difference should be made between the righteous and the wicked; and that for these reasons:

1. Because this is a judgment which God himself executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of its cause, but an act of God, as a judge. Now it is essential to a judge to make a discrimination between the good and the bad, so as to punish the one, and to spare the other; and this is as necessary to all proper acts of judgment in this world as the other: there being no other difference between them, but that one is a particular judgment, and the other the general judgment of the whole world.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in punishing, it may reasonably be

expected that he should make a difference between the good and the bad ; for the reason why he does not in his common providence, is because he will not break and interrupt the established order of things upon every little occasion : but when he does go besides the common course of things in punishing, the reason ceaseth, which hindered him before from making a difference ; and it is reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a miraculous judgment, a miraculous difference should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these miraculous judgments would not be attained ; which is remarkably to punish the crying sins of men, and by the example to deter others from the like sins : but if these judgments should fall promiscuously upon the righteous and the wicked, it would not be evident, that they were designed for the punishment of such sins, when men did see that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those sins ; consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter men from sin.

Upon all these accounts, you see that Abraham's reasoning was very strong and well grounded, as to those judgments which are miraculous and extraordinary, and immediately inflicted by God, for the punishment of great and heinous sins, which was the case he was speaking of. And accordingly we find, that, in those judgments which have been immediately and miraculously inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the righteous and the wicked. In the deluge which he brought upon the old world, the Spirit of God gives this reason why the judgment was so universal, because " all flesh had corrupted his way upon the

earth;" and the reason why he saved Noah and his family was, because in this general corruption of mankind he alone was righteous; "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." So likewise in that miraculous judgment of Korah and his company, when God "made a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth to swallow them up," none perished but he and his complices; the rest had warning given them by God to "remove from the tents of those wicked men." Thus you see, that as to the particular case in the text, Abraham's reasoning concerning the justice of God is very firm and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to discourse upon; viz. to consider the justice of God, in general, in the distribution of rewards and punishments. And here I cannot but grant, that the best evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonstrations of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God, in this vast and admirable frame of things which we see; but we must stay till the day of judgment for a clear and full manifestation of the Divine justice; for which reason the day of judgment is in Scripture called, "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." But in the mean time we may receive sufficient assurance of this, both from natural reason, and from Divine revelation.

1. From natural reason, which tells us, that God loves righteousness, and hates iniquity, and consequently that it must be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to discountenance the other; that is, to give some public testimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and dislike of the other; which

cannot otherwise be done, but by rewards and punishments.

But however the heathen reasoned about this matter, whatever premises they laid, they firmly believed the conclusion, that God is just. Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That God is in no wise unjust, but as righteous as is possible; and that we cannot resemble God more, than in this quality and disposition." So likewise Seneca tells us, "That the gods are neither capable of receiving any injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjust." Antoninus, the great emperor and philosopher, speaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguished by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be just, (says he,) you may be sure it is so; if it be not just, you may certainly conclude the contrary; for God is just, and, being so, he will do nothing that is unjust or unreasonable." And, indeed, the heathen philosophers looked upon this as the great sanction of all moral precepts, that God was the witness and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui secus faxit, deus ipse vindex erit;* "If any man do contrary to them, God himself will punish it;" which shews, that there is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the Divine justice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2. Second place, from Scripture, or Divine revelation. And those texts which I shall produce to this purpose, may be reduced to these two heads: either such as prove the rectitude of the Divine nature, and his justice in general; or such as speak more particularly of the justice and equity of his providence in the distribution of rewards and punish-

ments. I begin, first, with those which declare the rectitude of the Divine nature, and the justice of God in general; and that, either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injustice and unrighteousness, at the greatest distance from him.

1. Those which attribute this perfection to God. I shall mention but a few of many: (Psal. cxxix. 4.) "The Lord is righteous." (Dan. ix. 7.) "O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee." This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of God, (Ezra ix. 15.) "O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous." And this the worst of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity; (Exod. ix. 27.) then "Pharaoh said, The Lord is righteous." This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have lain under the greatest temptation to doubt of it; (Jer. xii. 1.) "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet, let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" The prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconciled with the justice of God's providence; yet, before he would so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, "Righteous art thou, O Lord." To this head, likewise, belong all those texts which speak of righteousness, as God's dwelling-place, and his throne, of his delight in justice, and of the duration and eternity of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other texts which remove the contrary, viz. injustice and unrighteousness, at the greatest distance from God, as being most con-

trary to his nature and perfection. (Deut. xxxii. 4.) "A God of truth, and without iniquity." (2 Chron. xix. 7.) "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of gifts." (Job viii. 3.) "Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" which is a vehement negation of the thing. (Job xxxiv. 10—12.) "Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." (Rom. ix. 14.) "What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."

Secondly, There are other texts which speak more particularly of the justice and righteousness of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments. It is true, indeed, the justice of God doth not constantly appear in this world in the dispensations of his providence, because this is a time of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of trial and exercise to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things shall be set straight, and every man shall receive the just reward of his deeds, when the justice of God shall be evident to all the world, and every eye shall see it, and shall acknowledge the righteous judgment of God; and this the Scripture most clearly and expressly declares unto us; and hence it is, that the day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The righteousness of God doth not now so clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there shall be a day of revelation, when the righte-

ousness of God shall be made manifest to all the world.

The remunerative justice of God shall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the punitive justice of God in punishing the wicked and ungodly; "so that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth the world."

Now the righteousness of this vengeance of God, which God will take upon sinners, is further set forth to us in Scripture, from the equity and impartiality of it.

I. From the equity of it.

1. In that the sins of men have justly deserved the punishment, that shall come upon them; (Rom. i. 32.) "Who, knowing the judgment of God, δικαίωμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, the righteous judgment of God, "that they which commit such things are worthy of death."

2. In that the judgment of God shall be proportioned to the degree and heinousness of men's sins, so as the lesser or greater sins shall be punished with more or less severity. So our Saviour threatens to those who continue impenitent under the gospel, and the advantages of it, their case shall be more sad than that of Tyre and Sidon, and "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for them," (Matt. xi. 21, 22.) And (Luke xii. 47, 48.) there you have different degrees of punishment threatened, proportionable to the aggravations of the sins which men have committed; "The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew it not, but did commit

things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;" and so proportionably of all other aggravations of sins, "for to whom much is given, of him shall much be required; and unto whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." So, likewise, God will vindicate the contempt of the gospel more severely than of the law, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the salvation offered by it greater. (Heb. ii. 3, 4.) "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape?" &c. And so, (Heb. x. 28, 29.) "He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" &c.

II. The righteousness of this judgment is further set forth to us in Scripture by the impartiality of it. Hither belong all those texts, which remove from God that προσωπολημψία, that "respect of persons," which is so incident to human tribunals. Now, respect of persons is in distribution of justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon account of those circumstances, to deal unequally with those, whose case is equal; as when two persons, who are equally guilty of a crime, are brought to their trial, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendship, or relation, or some other interest; because one is poor, and the other rich; the one hath powerful friends to intercede for him, the other not; the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not; or upon any other account, besides the pure

merits of the cause; I say, to deal thus in the distribution of justice, is respect of persons. Otherwise, in matters of mere grace and favour, respect of persons hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, προσωπολημψία, *locum non habet in gratuitis, sed in debitis.* Now this the Scripture every where speaks of as a thing very far from God. (Deut. x. 17.) "The Lord your God is the God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh rewards." (2 Chron. xix. 7.) "There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." (Job xxxiv. 18, 19.) "Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked? or to princes, Ye are ungodly? How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor! for they are all the work of his hands." (Rom. ii. 6.) "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: for there is no respect of persons with God." (Acts x. 34, 35.) "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Eph. vi. 8.) The apostle there presseth the duties of servants to masters, from this consideration, that "whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free;" and at the 9th verse, "Ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him." He maketh this likewise an argument, why men should not oppress and deal deceitfully one with another: (Col. iii. 25.) "But he that doeth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done, and there is no re-

spect of persons." And, in general, St. Peter urgeth this consideration upon all men to deter them from sin in any kind: (1 Pet. i. 17.) "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

And, besides that the Scripture doth remove this at the greatest distance from God, it gives us also several instances of the impartiality of the Divine justice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aside by any of those extrinsical considerations which commonly sway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and entreaties. (Matt. vii. 21, 22.) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," &c. The Divine justice is not to be imposed upon by good words, and external shows, and false professions; so neither by any external relation to him: "For many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness."

And, however men may bear up themselves now upon their worldly greatness and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greatest persons in the world, those who overturn kingdoms, and lay waste countries, and oppress and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own lusts and ambition; I say, there is a day a coming, when even these, as much, nay, more than others, shall fear and tremble before the impartial justice of God. (Rev. vi. 15.) "And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains,

and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?" The impartial justice of God will treat the greatest and the meanest persons alike. (Rev. xx. 12.) "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works." All judged "according to their works."

I should next proceed to vindicate the justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments, from those objections which seem to impeach it: but before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the world; and that is, how far justice, especially as to the punishment of offenders, is essential to God? And for the clearing of this matter, I shall briefly lay down these propositions:

1st, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every perfection is essential to God, and cannot be imagined to be separated from the Divine nature, because this is the natural notion which men have of God, that he is a being that hath all perfection.

2dly, The actual constant exercise of those Divine perfections, the effects whereof are without himself, is not essential to God. For instance, though God be essentially powerful and good, yet it is not necessary that he should always exercise his power and goodness, but at such times, and in such a manner, as seems best to his wisdom; and this is likewise true of his wisdom and justice, because these are

perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon something without himself.

3dly, It is essential to God to love goodness, and hate sin, wherever he sees them. It is not necessary there should be a world, or reasonable creatures in it: but upon supposition that God makes such creatures, it is agreeable to the Divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to discourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by rewards and punishments; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the Divine nature, to reward goodness, and to punish sin.

4thly, As for those rewards which the gospel promiseth, and the punishments which it threatens, there is some difference to be made between the rewarding and punishing justice of God.

1. As for that abundant reward God is pleased to promise to good men, the promise of it is founded in his goodness, and the performance of that promise in his justice; for it is justice to perform what he promises, though the promise of so great and abundant a reward was mere goodness.

2. As for the punishing justice of God, about which hath been the great question, whether that be essential to God or not, it seems very plain, that it is not necessary that God should inflict those judgments which he threatens, because he hath threatened them; for there is not the like obligation upon persons to perform their threatenings, that there is to perform their promises; because God, by his promise, becomes a debtor to those to whom he makes the promise; but when he threatens, he is the creditor, and we are debtors to his justice; and as a cre-

ditor, he may remit the punishment which he hath threatened: but then, if we consider God as loving goodness and hating sin; if we look upon him as governor of the world, and concerned to preserve good order, to encourage holiness and righteousness, and to discountenance sin; under this consideration it is essential to him to punish sin at such times, and in such manner and circumstances, as seem best to his wisdom.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by some learned men to the contrary, that if punishing justice were essential to God, then he must punish the sinner immediately, so soon as he hath offended, and to the utmost of his power; because whatever acts naturally, acts necessarily, and to the utmost: for I do not suppose such a justice essential to God as acts necessarily, but such a justice, which, as to the time, and manner, and circumstances of its acting, is regulated and determined by his wisdom; and there is the same reason, likewise, of his goodness.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the dispensations of God in this world, and partly from the punishments of the other.

First, As to the dispensations of God in this world, there are these two things objected against the justice of the Divine providence:

I. The inequality of God's dealings with good and bad men in this world.

II. The translation of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another; as, the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

First objection, The inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life

things happen promiscuously, " there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked;" if the wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the righteous; if the righteous sometimes flourish, so do the wicked: and is not this unjust, that those who are so unequal as to their deserts, should be equally dealt withal? or if there be any inequality it is usually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, prosper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old against the providence of God, which the heathen philosophers took so much pains to answer; nay, it did often shake the faith of holy and good men in the Old Testament: (Job xii. 6.) " The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly;" and chap. xxi. 7—9. he expostulates the same matter again: and David says, this was a great stumbling-block to him; (Psal. lxxiii. 2, 3.) and the like we find in the prophets, (Jer. xii. 1. Hab. i. 13.) This objection I have elsewhere considered; I shall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to justice, to shew itself immediately, and to dispense rewards and punishments so soon as there are objects for them. This is not thought necessary among men, much more ought we to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine the time and circumstances of the exercising of his justice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjust, if he do not bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, just when we think he should.

2. If God intended this life for a state of trial, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and

their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reasonable to expect that he should follow men with present rewards and punishments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, so that there would hardly be an opportunity of trying them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reason in the world to presume that God should exercise the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad men to take their course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them so often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men shall be judged "according to their works," then this objection vanisheth; for that great day will set all things straight, which seem now to be so crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and punishments to the most convenient season, is so far from being a reflection upon the justice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What Claudian says of Ruffinus, a very bad man, whose long impunity had tempted men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this case:

> *Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,*
> *Absolvitque deos.*

"The punishment which overtook him at last, did quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and absolved the gods from all blame." When men look but a little way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit God

in their thoughts from all those imputations of injustice, which, from the inequality of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are apt to charge him withal.

Second objection, From the translation of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of "the fathers upon the children," which God threatens in the second commandment, and did, in some sort, fulfil in Ahab, "in bringing the evil he had threatened him withal, in his son's days." (1 Kings xxi. 29.) The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of Achan upon the whole congregation. (Josh. xxii. 20.) "Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel! and that man perished not alone in his iniquity." And the sin of David upon the people, (2 Sam. xxiv.) when seventy thousand died of the plague, for David's sin in numbering the people? Now how is this agreeable to justice? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput sequitur?* "Mischief pursues the sinner?" What can be more reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant authores?* "Than that men's faults should be charged upon the authors;" and punishment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this,

1. It is not unreasonable that one man should bear the punishment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it: *Volenti non fit injuria*; "There is no wrong done to those that are willing to undergo it," though they be innocent; which was the case of our blessed Saviour suffering for us, "the just for the unjust," as the Scripture expresseth it.

2. Where the person upon whom the punishment

is transferred, is likewise a sinner, and obnoxious to God, there can be no injustice; because he hath deserved it upon his own account, and God may take what occasion he pleaseth to punish them that deserve to be punished.

3. In punishing the iniquity of the father upon the children, the guilty person, that is, the father, is punished in the calamity of his children; for a man's children are himself multiplied: and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the second commandment, God promiseth to "shew mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him;" but he "visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," but to "the third and fourth generation;" that is, so far as man may live to see them punished, and suffer in their punishment.

4. As to the punishment of the people for the sins of their princes and governors, and one part of a community for another, supposing all of them to be sinners, which is the true case, God may lay the punishment where he pleaseth; and there is no more injustice, than when a man is whipped on the back for the theft which his hand committed, a community being one body: besides, the prince is punished in the loss of his people, the glory of a king consisting in the multitude of his subjects.

The objection with respect to the other world, the punishment of temporal evils with eternal, is elsewhere answered.

The use we should make of this whole discourse is,

First, If God be just and righteous, let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the reason whereof is most hidden and obscure: Nehemiah, (ix. 33.) speaking of the great afflictions that had befallen God's own people, yet this he

lays down as a firm principle, "Howbeit, thou art just in all that is brought upon us."

Secondly, This is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth now exercise his milder attributes towards sinners, his mercy, and patience, and goodness: but if we despise these, that terrible attribute of his justice will display itself; and this the Scripture describes in a severe manner; "The Lord revengeth, and is jealous: the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies."

Thirdly, This is matter of comfort to good men, that the righteous God governs the world, and will judge it: "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice," (Psal. xcvii. 1.) and he gives the reason of it in the next verse; "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Though he be omnipotent, we need not fear; for his power is always under the conduct of eternal righteousness.

Fourthly, Let us imitate this righteousness; let us endeavour to "be righteous as he is righteous;" let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is just and due to men. This duty hath an immutable reason, founded in the nature of God.

SERMON CXL.

THE TRUTH OF GOD.

A God of truth.—Deut. xxxii. 4.

In speaking to this attribute, I shall,

I. Shew you what we are to understand by the truth of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is "a God of truth."

III. Answer some objections that may be made against it; and then make some use of it.

I. What we are to understand by the truth of God. I shall take it as the Scripture useth it in a large sense, so as to include not only the veracity of God, but his faithfulness. Hence it is that, in Scripture, truth and faithfulness are so often put together, and frequently put one for another: (Isa. xxv. 1.) "Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth." (Rev. xxi. 5.) "These words are true and faithful." And the faithfulness of God in performing his promises, is frequently called his truth. And because the Scripture useth them promiscuously, we need not be very solicitous to find out distinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be distinguished thus: the truth or veracity of God hath place in every declaration of his mind; the faithfulness of God only in his promises.

For the first, The veracity or truth of God; this hath place in every declaration of his mind; and signifies an exact correspondence and conformity

between his word and his mind, and consequently between his word and the truth and reality of things. The correspondence of his word with his mind, depends upon the rectitude of his will; the conformity of his word with the reality of things, not only upon the rectitude of his will, but the perfection of his knowledge, and the infallibility of his understanding: so that when we say God is true, or speaks truth, we mean thus, that his words are a plain declaration of his mind, and the true representation of things, in opposition to falsehood, which is speaking otherwise than the thing is, and hypocrisy, that is, speaking otherwise than we think. For instance, when God declares any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus, the thing really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any thing, he does really desire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we should do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretels any thing future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the declaration be to be understood conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, The faithfulness of God. This only hath place in his promises, in which there is an obligation of justice superadded to his word; for God, by his promise, doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be, but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his promise would not only cast an imputation upon his truth, but upon his justice.

II. That this perfection belongs to God. And this I shall endeavour to prove,

First, From the dictates of natural light.

Secondly, From Scripture.

First, From the dictates of natural light. Natural light tells us, that truth and faithfulness are perfections, and consequently belong to the Divine nature; and that falsehood and a lie are imperfections, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is esteemed amongst men a greater contumely and reproach than to give a man the lie, to call him a liar, because it is an argument of so much baseness, and of a low, and mean, and servile spirit; the usual temptation to it being fear of losing some advantage, or incurring some danger. Hence was that saying, that "it is the property of a slave to lie, but of a free man to speak truth:" now, whatever argues baseness or imperfection, our reason tells us is infinitely to be separated from the most perfect Being. "God cannot be tempted with evil;" the Divine nature, being all-sufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwise than good, and just, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the Divine nature hath the security of its fulness and all-sufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increase, nor fear any impairment of its estate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either because they are rash and inconsiderate in passing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconstant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of these are incident to God; his infinite wisdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foresight of all events, secure him both from inconsiderateness, and inconstancy, and forgetfulness; and his infinite power renders him able to

perform what he hath spoken, and to make good his word. And that these are the natural dictates and suggestions of our minds, appears clearly from the reasoning of the heathens in this matter, who were destitute of Divine revelation. Plato (de Repub. lib. 2.) lays down this as a certain truth, "That lying and falsehood are imperfections, and odious to God and men;" Τὸ μὲν ψεῦδος οὐ μόνον ἀπὸ Θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται. And afterwards he tells us, "That the Divine nature is free from all temptations hereto, either from advantage or fear;" Οὔκ ἄρ' ἐστὶν οὗ ἕνεκα ἂν Θεὸς ψεύδοιτο; πάντη ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον· and concludes, "Therefore, God is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his words and actions, and is neither changed himself, nor deceives us." Porphyry, in the life of Pythagoras, tells us, "That this was one of his precepts, Μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; Τοῦτο γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τους ἀνθρώπους ποιεῖν Θεῷ παραπλησιούς·" and afterwards he adds, "That truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible to men, he would choose light for his body, and truth for his soul."

Secondly, From Scripture. The Scripture doth very frequently attribute this to God: (2 Sam. vii. 28.) "And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true." (Psal. xxv. 10.) "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." (Psal. xxxi. 5.) "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." (Rev. iii. 7.) "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." (Rev. vi. 10.) "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" (Psal. xv. 3.) "Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." (Ps. xvi. 7.) "True and righteous are thy judgments." Hither we may refer those texts which speak of the plenty and abundance of

God's truth: (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) "Abundant in goodness and truth." (Psal. lxxxvi. 15.) "Plenteous in mercy and truth;" and those which speak of the duration and eternity of it: (Psal. c. 5.) "And his truth endureth to all generations." (Psal. cxvii. 2.) "And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever." (Psal. cxlvi. 6.) "Who keepeth truth for ever."

As the Scripture doth attribute this perfection to God, so it removes the contrary from him with the greatest abhorrence and detestation: (Numb. xxiii. 19.) "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall not he do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" They are Balaam's words, but God put them into his mouth. (1 Sam. xv. 29.) "The Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent." (Rom. iii. 4.) "Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar." Nay, the Scripture goes further; does not only remove lying, and falsehood, and inconstancy from God, but speaks of these as things impossible to the Divine nature: (Tit. i. 2.) "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began." (Heb. vi. 18.) "That, by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

And the Scripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly assure us of his sincerity, and truth, and faithfulness. Of his sincerity, that he deals plainly with us, and speaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true representation of his mind. God is very careful to remove this jealousy out of the minds of men, who are apt to enter-

tain unworthy thoughts of God, as if, notwithstanding all that he hath declared, he had a secret design to ruin men; therefore, he interposeth his oath for our greater assurance. (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live." When God speaks to us, he speaks his mind, and hath no design to circumvent and possess us with error and delusion: if he offer life and happiness, we may believe he is real; and that if he did not intend to bestow it upon us, or if there were no such thing as a future glory, he would not have declared it to us: this was the temper of our Saviour, who was "the express image of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John xiv. 2.) "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you."

And as the Scripture assures us of his sincerity, so of his truth and faithfulness in the accomplishment of all his predictions, and performances of all his promises. As for the truth of his predictions, and certain accomplishment of them, the Scripture frequently useth this proverbial speech, to assure us of the certainty of their accomplishment; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matt. xxiv. 35.) For the faithfulness of God in his promises, the Scripture makes frequent mention of it: (Deut. vii. 9.) "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy." (Psal. lxxxix. 33, 34.) "I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail: my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." The Scripture doth record God's punctual and full performance of his promises, particularly of that pro-

mise to Abraham, after four hundred years, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, and to give them the land of Canaan for an inheritance, (Gen. xv. 13.) The punctual accomplishment you have recorded, Exod. xii. 41. "And it came to pass, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." (See likewise, Josh. xxi. 44, 45; xxiii. 14; 1 Kings viii. 56.) And upon this account it is that God is so frequently in Scripture styled "the God that keepeth covenant," (1 Kings viii. 23; Nehem. i. 5; ix. 32.) and in several other places. And so likewise of predictions of evil to come, God is true in fulfilling his word: (1 Sam. xv. 29.) when the prophet had threatened Saul to rend the kingdom from him, he adds, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man that he should repent."

III. I come to remove some objections that may be made against the truth and faithfulness of God.

First, It is objected against the sincerity of God, and his plain dealing, that he is sometimes represented in Scripture as inspiring prophets with false messages. (1 Kings xxii. 22, &c.; Jer. iv. 10; xx. 7; Ezek. xiv. 9.)

Answer.—As to three of these texts, it is a known Hebraism to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively. So where the devils besought Christ, that he would suffer them to enter into the herd of swine, "he said unto them, Go," (Matt. viii. 31.) He did not command, but permit them. And so (John xiii. 27.) where our Saviour says to Judas, "What thou doest, do quickly;" we are not to understand, that he commanded him to betray him, though that

seem to be expressed in the form. So likewise here, where an evil spirit offered himself to be "a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet;" and God says, "Go forth, and do so;" this only signifies a permission, not a command. And so (Jer. iv. 10.) where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, "saying, they should have peace, when the sword reacheth to the soul;" we are to understand this no otherwise, but that God permitted the false prophets to deceive them, prophesying peace to them; as appears by the history. (Ezek. xiv. 9.) "I the Lord have deceived that prophet;" that is, permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people, as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity, with respect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse; "I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols;" because they have chosen to themselves false gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets: and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, "and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and I will destroy him from the midst of my people." Now God will not punish that whereof he is the author.

That text, (Jer. xx. 7.) "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived," signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the promise of God to him; who, when he gave him his commission, told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and now he was become a derision, and the people mocked him; and in his passion and weakness he breaks forth into this expression, "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;" whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning of

God's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first chapter.

Second objection against the faithfulness of God as to performance of his promise. It is objected, that God did not give the children of Israel all the land which he promised to Abraham; as will appear by comparing Gen. xviii. 19, 20. with Josh. xiii. 1, &c. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. (Gen. xv. 18.) God promised to give Abraham and his seed such a land, the bounds whereof he describes, (Josh. xiii. 1.) It is said there, that "there remained very much land" yet unconquered, which they had not got the possession of. And (Judg. ii. 20.) it is said, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would suspend the further performance of his promise, and would not drive out any more of the nations before them; and it is probable, that the Israelites never were possessed of the promised land in the full latitude and extent of the promise.

Answer.—This covenant of God with Abraham, was upon consideration of his past faith and obedience, though it seems the full performance of it did likewise depend upon the future obedience of his posterity; in pursuance of this covenant, notwithstanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, God did bring them into the promised land, though "they provoked him to destroy them many a time; because he remembered his covenant with Abraham:" when they were possessed of it, God gave them a title to the rest, and would have assisted them in the conquest of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part; that is, con-

tinued faithful and obedient to him; but they did not, and thereby discharged God from any further performance of his promise; and God, when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with Abraham, so far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of Joshua, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, (Josh. xxi. 44.) and of Solomon, (1 Kings viii. 56.) Yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon consideration of Abraham's faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his posterity, the rebellions and disobedience of the people in the wilderness had released God wholly from the promise; and he had not been unfaithful if he had destroyed utterly that people, and made a full end of them, and they had "never entered into that land;" because a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to cease: and that this condition was implied in this covenant with Abraham, appears by these texts, (Deut. vii. 12, 13; xi. 22, 23. 32.) And (Judg. ii. 20, 21.) God gives this reason why he suspended the complete performance of his promise; "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joshua left when he died."

Third objection: God is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as, when he threatened Adam, (Gen. ii. 17.) "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" which yet was not accomplished, for he lived many hundred years after. God threatened Ahab, to bring evil upon him and his

family, (1 Kings xxi. 21.) but, upon his humiliation, he is pleased to respite it, (ver. 29.) So God threatened Hezekiah with death; but, upon his prayer, adds fifteen years to his life. (2 Kings xx.) Thus Nineveh was threatened; but, upon their repentance, "God repented of the evil," (Jonah iii. 10.) Now, how is this deferring and turning away of judgment consistent with the truth of God? Doth not this seem to charge him with falsehood or levity?

Answer.—This may be said in general—that every one that understands the nature of God, cannot but be very well assured, that falsehood and levity are very far from God; and though he could not untie some particular knots, and answer all difficulties, yet he ought to rest satisfied in this assurance. I confess this objection is troublesome, and requires a distinct consideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters; but I shall, with submission, offer these things in answer to it:

1. As for the expression of God's repenting, we are to understand it, as many others in Scripture, after the manner of men, and spoken by way of condescension to our weakness, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as casting any imputation of falsehood or inconstancy upon God, as if either he did not intend what he saith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is said to repent, the expression only signifies thus much—that God doth not execute that which seemed to us to have been his purpose, that he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatenings seemed openly to express, because of some tacit condition implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the truth, or sincerity, or constancy of God, in his word. Not from his truth; for he speaks what he intends really, if some-

thing did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened; upon which he was resolved, when he threatened, to be taken off, and stop his judgments: nor doth it derogate from his sincerity and plainness; for he hath told us that his threatenings have such conditions implied in them: nor doth it derogate from the constancy and immutability of God, because God doth not *mutare consilium, sed sententiam;* "he doth not change his counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence" which he had passed with reserved conditions.

2. As to the instances, that I may give more particular satisfaction to them, I shall consider the threatenings of God with this double respect—either with relation to a law, or with relation to the event; with relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it; or with relation to the event, as they are predictions of something to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it. And thus considered, they differ from promises; for promises confer a right. *Omne promissum cadit in debitum;* but a threatening doth not convey any right, nor, if forborne, can the party complain of wrong done to him; and therefore, in this case, it can only signify what the offence against the law deserves, and what the offender may expect; for the end of threatening is not punishment, but the avoiding of it: and this may answer the first instance. God gave Adam a law; and, by way of sanction, not of prediction of an event, he threatened the breach of it with death: now God did not execute the punishment threatened at the time threatened, but deferred it, and this without any impeachment of his justice or truth, because this threatening was only the sanction of the law.

(2.) We may consider threatenings with relation to the event, and as predictions; and as to the accomplishment of these, there seems to be a greater degree of necessity, because the honour of God's knowledge, and power, and truth, seem to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, it must either be for want of knowledge to foresee events, or power to bring them to pass, or constancy to his word. Now, if we consider threatenings with respect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other instances may be satisfied, by laying down this rule for the understanding of them; viz. "That all prophetical threatenings or predictions of judgments are to be understood with this tacit condition—if there do not intervene the humiliation, and repentance, and prayer of the persons against whom the judgment is threatened; and if so, God may, upon repentance, without any impeachment of the honour of his truth, or knowledge, or power, either defer, or abate, or remit the punishment." And that the predictions of judgments are to be understood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, To make some use of this doctrine.

First, If God be a God of truth, then this gives us assurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not false; but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and mistake. Were it not for the veracity of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a constant delusion; and no man could demonstrate the contrary, but that this is our make and temper, and the very frame of our understandings, to be then most of all deceived, when we think ourselves to be

most certain; I say, no man could be assured of the contrary but from hence, because veracity and truth is a Divine perfection, and therefore God cannot be the author of error and delusion. Therefore we may be assured, that the frame of our understandings is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true, and, unless it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are necessary to our happiness.

Secondly, If God be a God of truth, then there is reason why we should believe and assent to whatever we are satisfied is revealed to us by God. A Divine revelation is a sufficient ground for the most firm assent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the highest evidence, and ought to give us the most firm assurance, of the truth of it. Hence it is that the word of God is called the word of truth, yea, and truth itself: (John xvii. 17.) " Thy word is truth."

Therefore, whoever entertains the Scriptures as the word of God, and is satisfied of the Divine authority of them, ought, in reason, to believe every thing contained in them, yea, though there be some things of which no reasonable account can be given, and which our reason and understanding cannot give us particular satisfaction in; yea, because we are satisfied that they are revealed by God, " who cannot lie," whose knowledge is infallible, and whose word is true, we ought, upon this higher and superior reason, to yield a firm assent to the truth of them; if we do not, we dishonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this essential property, his veracity: (1 John v. 10.) " He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

As, on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and set our seal to his veracity. So it is said of Abraham, (Rom. iv. 20.) that "he was strong in faith, giving glory to God." And St. John the Baptist, speaking concerning our Saviour, saith, (John iii. 33.) "He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal that God is true."

Thirdly, If God be a God of truth, and faithful in performing his promise, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and trust. If God have made any promise, we may securely rely upon it, that it shall be made good; we may hold fast our hope "without wavering, because he is faithful who hath promised," (Heb. x. 23.) Hence it is that the blessings of God's covenant are called "sure mercies." (Isa. lv. 3.)

We attribute much to the word of a faithful friend, and look upon the promise of an honest man as very good security; but men may fail us when we rely upon them: but God is true, though all men should prove liars. Men are fickle and mutable; but the nature of God is fixed, he cannot fail those that trust in him. When God hath made any promise to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulness. So we find David did, 2 Sam. vii. 25, &c.

Only we should be careful to perform the condition which is required on our part; (Heb. iv. 1.) we should "take heed, lest a promise being left us, any one should come short of it," by not performing the condition; for that doth release and discharge him of the promise; and he is faithful, though he doth not perform what he promised, because he did not promise but upon condition: and this seems to be the meaning of those words, (2 Tim. ii. 13.) "If we

believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself." He said before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will bestow the blessings promised: "It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him:" but if we deny him, the curse threatened will then take place, and he will deny us; and God is not unfaithful in doing this, he does not deny himself.

Now if we have such assurance, we may trust him with our greatest concernments, and venture our souls with him: (Psal. xxxi. 5.) "Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." We should rely upon him, when there are the greatest improbabilities of the accomplishment of his promises. Thus did Abraham, Rom. iv. 17, &c.

This should make us also patient in hope: if a promise be not speedily accomplished, we should not be dejected, or disquieted. David challengeth himself upon this account: (Psal. xlii. 11.) "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." And so likewise in reference to the rewards of another world, though at a distance; yet we should, as the apostle speaks, "wait for the blessed hope."

Fourthly, The truth of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may justly be expected, because their sins deserve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canst reasonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of humiliation and repentance: and if, notwithstand-

ing these threatenings, thou continuest in thy sins, and "blessest thyself, saying, I shall have peace, though thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart;" by this very thing thou provokest the justice of God not to spare thee, and makest his wrath and his jealousy to smoke against thee; and if thou continuest impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his truth and veracity is concerned to inflict eternal punishments upon thee; for "he hath sworn in his wrath" that such "shall not enter into his rest."

Fifthly, Let us propound to ourselves the truth of God for our pattern and imitation. Would you be like God? be true and faithful. Truth and faithfulness are Divine perfections, but lying and falsehood are the properties of the devil, and the predominant qualities of hell. The character of the devil is, that "he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, it is of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John viii. 44.)

One of the first and most natural notions that we have of religion is, that it is to imitate God, and to endeavour to be like him, so far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the Divine excellences and perfections is the highest sin; because it is against the clearest dictates of our mind, and contrary to those principles which are most deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, false and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt; because these sins are contrary to the chiefest and most essential perfections of God. Lying is a sin that would fly in the face of a heathen, because it directly contradicts those natural notions which every man hath of God and religion; therefore, we find that there is hardly any thing that men are

more ashamed of, than to be taken in a lie, and it is esteemed the highest reproach to be charged with it; it argues such a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, the nature of God, and consequently so much imperfection and baseness; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and base towards men.

Upon these accounts, God expresseth himself highly offended with those that practise lying and falsehood, and to have a detestation of them; (Prov. xii. 22.) "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." It renders us unlike to him: (Eph. iv. 24, 25.) "Put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness" (or, in the holiness of truth). And from hence he infers, "Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbour, for we are members one of another." (Col. iii. 9, 10.) "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him;" that is, because we profess to be conformed to the image of God. More particularly, we should charge ourselves with truth and faithfulness towards God and men.

1. Towards God, in our oaths, and vows, and covenants. In our oaths, when we swear in any matter, we tell God that what we speak is truth, and invoke him to bear witness to it. To falsify in an oath, is one of the most solemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And so in our vows, which are a solemn promise to God, of such things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth, will neither be rash in making a vow, nor

careless to perform it: (Eccles. v. 4.) "When thou vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools." Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either of rashness in the making of it, or of inconstancy in not keeping it.

So, likewise, in all our covenants with God, to serve him, and obey him, and keep his commandments, we should strictly charge ourselves with performance of these. There is a natural obligation upon us to these things, from the very law of our creation, though we should never solemnly make any such promise, nor enter into any such engagements, because it is a tacit condition of our beings: but the taking of this covenant solemnly upon us in baptism, strengthens this obligation, and makes our unfaithfulness the greater sin. All our hopes of happiness are founded in the faithfulness of God; and if thou be false to him, how canst thou expect he should be faithful to thee? It is true, indeed, that "he abides faithful, he cannot deny himself;" but if thou hast any ingenuity in thee, this should be an argument for thee to be faithful to him; I am sure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful; for if thou breakest the covenant thou hast entered into, and neglectest the conditions upon which God hath suspended the performance of his promise, thou dischargest the obligation on his part.

2. Towards men: We should charge ourselves with truth in all our words, and faithfulness in all our promises. It becomes us, who worship the God of truth, to speak truth; to use plainness and sincerity in all our words; to abhor falsehood and dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lying,

by equivocation of words, and secret reservations of our minds, on purpose to deceive. Those that plead for these, it is a sign they do not understand the nature of God, and of religion; which is, to conform ourselves to the Divine perfections. We meet with many complaints in the Old Testament, of the want of truth and faithfulness among men: (Psal. xii. 1, 2; Isa. lix. 13—15; Jer. vii. 2. 8, 9; ii. 4—6; Hos. iv. 1.) I am afraid there is as much reason for this complaint now; for we live in an age of greater light, which doth reprove and make manifest this work of darkness; and, methinks, there is no sadder sign of the decay of Christianity, and of the little power and influence that the gospel hath upon us, than that there is so little regard had by Christians to these moral duties; which, because moral (however men may slight that word), are therefore of eternal and indispensable obligation, having their foundation in the nature of God.

To conclude all: That man that can dispense with himself, as to moral duties, that makes no conscience of telling a lie, or breaking his word; what badge soever he may wear, what title soever he may call himself by, it is as impossible that such a man should be a true Christian, as it is to reconcile the God of truth and the father of lies.

SERMON CXLI.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.—1 PET. i. 16.

IN speaking to this attribute, I shall,

I. Inquire what we are to understand by the holiness of God.

II. Endeavour to shew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to understand by the holiness of God. There is some difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in Scripture, than this of holiness, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have spoken more sparingly of, than this.

The general notion of holiness is, that it is a separation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use. And this notion of holiness is applicable either to things or persons. To things: thus the vessels of the tabernacle, and the vestments of the priests, were said to be holy, because they were separated from common use, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent use of the service of God. Holiness of persons is twofold; either relative and external, which signifies the peculiar relation of a person to God; such were called ἱερεῖς, priests, or holy men: or else habitual and inherent; such is the holiness of good men, and it is a separation from moral imperfection, that is, from sin

and impurity: and this is called ὁσιότης, and the primary notion of it is negative, and signifies the absence and remotion of sin. And this appears in those explications which the Scripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by opposition to sin and impurity; (2 Cor. vii. 1.) "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness;" where holiness is opposed to all filthiness. Sometimes, by the negation of sin and defilement: so we find holy, and without blame, put together; (Eph. i. 4.) "Holy, and without blemish;" (Eph. v. 27.) "Holy, harmless, and undefiled;" (Heb. vii. 26.) It is true, indeed, this negative notion doth imply something that is positive; it doth not only signify the absence of sin, but a contrariety to it: we cannot conceive the absence of sin without the presence of grace; as, take away crookedness from a thing, and it immediately becomes straight. Whenever we are made holy, every lust and corruption in us is supplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this habitual holiness of persons, which consists in a separation from sin, is a conformity to the holiness of God; and by this we may come to understand what holiness in God is: and it signifies the peculiar eminency of the Divine nature, whereby it is separated and removed at an infinite distance from moral imperfection, and that which we call sin; that is, there is no such thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injustice, or falsehood, or unfaithfulness, in God; or if there be any other thing that signifies sin, and vice, and moral imperfection, holiness signifies that the Divine nature is at an infinite distance from all these, and possessed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore, all those texts that remove moral imperfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the Divine nature, do set forth the holiness of God: (Jam. i. 13.) "God cannot be tempted with evil." (Job viii. 3.) "Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" (Job xxxiv. 10. 12.) "Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." (Rom. ix. 14.) "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." (Zech. iii. 5.) "The just Lord is in the midst thereof, he will not do iniquity." And so falsehood, and unfaithfulness, and inconstancy. (Deut. xxxii. 4.) "A God of truth, and without iniquity." (1 Sam. xv. 29.) "The Strength of Israel will not lie." (Tit. i. 2.) "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised." (Heb. vi. 18.) "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie." Therefore, you shall find, that holiness is joined with all the moral perfections of the Divine nature, or put for them: (Hos. xi. 9.) "I am the Holy One in the midst of thee;" that is, the merciful One. (Psal. cxlv. 17.) "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." (Rom. vii. 12.) "The commandment is holy, and just, and good." (Rev. iii. 7.) "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." (Rev. vi. 10.) "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" (Psal. cv. 42.) "He remembered his holy promise;" holy, that is, in respect of the faithfulness of it. (Isa. lv. 3.) "The sure mercies of David," τὰ ὅσια, "the holy mercies of David," which will not fail.

So that the holiness of God, is not a particular,

but an universal perfection, and runs through all the moral perfections of the Divine nature; it is the beauty of the Divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: take away this, and you bring an universal stain and blemish upon the Divine nature; without holiness, power would be oppression; and wisdom, subtilty; and sovereignty, tyranny; and goodness, malice and envy; and justice, cruelty; and mercy, foolish pity; and truth, falsehood. And, therefore, the Scripture speaks of this, as God's highest excellency and perfection. God is said to be "glorious in holiness:" (Exod. xv. 11.) Holiness is called God's throne: (Psal. xlvii. 8.) "He sitteth upon the throne of his holiness." This is that which makes heaven: (Isa. lxiii. 15.) it is called, "the habitation of his holiness, and of his glory;" as if this were the very nature of God, and the sum of his perfections. The knowledge of God, is called, "the knowledge of the Holy One." (Prov. ix. 10.) To be made "partakers of a Divine nature," and to be made "partakers of God's holiness," are equivalent expressions; (2 Pet. i. 4. Heb. xii. 10.) And, because there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is represented as swearing by this; (Psal. lx. 6.) "God hath spoken in his holiness." (Psal. lxxxix. 35.) "Once have I sworn by my holiness." The angels and glorified spirits they sum up the perfections of God in this; (Isa. vi. 3.) "And one cried unto another, and said, Holy holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." (Rev. iv. 8.) "And they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." There is no attribute of God so often repeated as this; in some copies it is nine times.

II. I shall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to God,

First, From the light of nature. The philosophers, in all their discourses of God, agree in this, that whatever sounds like vice and imperfection, is to be separated from the Divine nature; which is to acknowledge his holiness. Plato, speaking of our likeness to God, saith, Ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. (Dan. iv. 9.) King Nebuchadnezzar calls God by this title, "I know that the spirit of the holy Gods is in thee." In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of God's moral perfections, proves his holiness.

Secondly, From Scripture. There is no title more frequently given to God, in Scripture, and so often ingeminated, as this of his holiness. He is called holiness itself; (Isa. lxiii. 15.) where heaven is called "the habitation of his holiness;" that is, of God. His name is said to be holy; (Luke i. 49.) "And holy is his name." He is called "the Holy One;" (Isa. xl. 25.) "The Holy One of Israel;" (Isa. xli. 20.) "The Holy One of Jacob;" (Isa. xxix. 23.) He is said to be "holy in all his works and promises;" (Psal. cv. 42.) "In all his ways and works;" (Psal. cxlv. 17.) This title is given to each of the three persons in the blessed Trinity; to God the Father, in innumerable places: to God the Son, (Dan. ix. 24.) "to anoint the most Holy." The devil cannot deny him this title; (Luke iv. 34.) "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." And the Spirit of God hath this title constantly given it, "the Holy Ghost," or "the Holy Spirit," or "the Spirit of holiness." The Scripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to God; (1 Sam. ii. 2.) "There is none holy

as the Lord." (Rev. xv. 4.) "For thou only art holy." Holiness is a communicable perfection; but no creature can partake of it in such a manner and degree as the Divine nature possesseth it. God is eternally holy, the fountain of holiness; the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. God is eminently and transcendently so; the creatures, in a finite degree. God is immutably so, it is impossible it should be otherwise; but no creature is out of an absolute possibility of sin. In this sense it is said, (Job iv. 18.) that "He putteth no trust in his servants, and his angels he chargeth with folly." And, (chap. xv. 15.) "He putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight." From all which I shall draw these inferences:

1. If holiness be a perfection of the Divine nature, and a property of God; if, in the notion of God, there be included an everlasting separation and distance from moral imperfection, and eternal repugnance to sin and iniquity; from hence we may infer, that there is an intrinsical good and evil in things; and the reasons and respects of moral good and evil do not depend upon any mutable, and inconstant, and arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eternal and indispensable. Therefore, they do not seem to me to speak so safely, who make the Divine will, precisely and abstractedly considered, the rule of moral good and evil; as if there were nothing good or evil in its own nature, antecedently to the will of God, but that all things are therefore good or evil because God wills them to be so: for if this were so, goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and faithfulness, would not be essential, and necessary, and immutable properties

of the Divine nature, but accidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable; which is to suppose that God, if he pleased, might be otherwise than good, and just, and true. For if these depend merely upon the will of God, and be not necessary or essential properties of the Divine nature, then the contrary of these, malice, and envy, and unrighteousness, and falsehood, do not imply any essential repugnancy to the Divine nature; which is plainly contrary to what the Scripture tells us, that "God cannot be tempted with evil;" that "it is impossible he should lie;" that he cannot be unrighteous.

If any man say that God hath now declared himself to be just, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwise, because "he is a God of truth, and he changeth not;" this is to grant the thing: for this supposeth the veracity and immutability of God to be essential and necessary perfections of the Divine nature; and why not justice and goodness as well? I say, it supposeth veracity and immutability to be essential perfections, and not to depend upon the will of God; that is, that God cannot will to be otherwise than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what assurance can we possibly have, but that when he declares himself to be good and just, he is, or may be otherwise?

But I need not insist upon this, which seems to be so very clear, and to carry its own evidence along with it. I will only use this argument to prove it, and so leave it. No being can will its own nature, and essential perfections; that is, choose whether it will be thus, or otherwise; for that were to suppose it to be before it is, and before it hath a being to deliberate about its own nature. Therefore, if this be the nature of God (which I think nobody will

deny), to be good, and just, and true, and necessarily to be what he is; then goodness, and justice, and truth, do not depend upon the will of God, but there are such things, such notions, antecedently to any act of the Divine will. And this does no ways prejudice the liberty of God; for this is the highest perfection, to be necessarily good, and just, and true; and a liberty or possibility to be otherwise, is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where speaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is conversant are indifferent; in all other things it is the highest perfection not to be free and indifferent; but immutable, and fixed, and necessarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodness, and justice, and truth, so that it shall not be possible to swerve from them; and this is the perfection of the Divine nature, which we call his holiness.

2. If holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the Divine nature, this shews us what account we are to make of sin, and wickedness, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkness are opposed, as habit and privation; if light be pleasant and comfortable, then darkness is dismal and horrid. And so holiness and sin are opposed: if holiness be the highest perfection of any nature, then sin is the grand imperfection, and the lowest debasement of any being; because it is the most opposite to that, and at the farthest distance from that, which is the first excellency and perfection.

This should rectify our judgment and esteem of things and persons. We admire and esteem riches, and power, and greatness; and we scorn and con-

temn poverty, and weakness, and meanness; yea, grace and holiness, if it be in the company of these. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be wicked, and to despise the poor man's wisdom and holiness; but we make a false judgment of things and persons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of respect, that ought to command our reverence and esteem, but real worth, and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to bestow our respect, and raise our esteem. What St. James saith of respect of persons, I may apply in this case: (James ii. 4.) "Are ye not then partial yourselves, and become judges of evil thoughts?" We are extremely partial; we make a false judgment, and reason ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and weakness exalted to high places; I mean, ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to God; and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holiness and piety. Were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudiced, we should see a beauty and resplendency in goodness; even when it is under the greatest disadvantage, when it is clothed with rags, and sits upon a dunghill, it would shine through all these mists, and we should see a native light and beauty in it, through the darkness of a poor and low condition: and we should see wickedness to be a most vile and abject thing, when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery; we should look upon the poor righteous man, as "more excellent than his neighbour;" and the profane gallant, as the offscouring of the earth. We should value a man that does justice, and loves

mercy, and speaks the truth to his neighbour; we should esteem any one more upon the account of any one of these simple qualities, than we would another man destitute of these, upon the account of a hundred titles of honour, and ten thousand acres of land. A wicked and unholy man, he is a vile person, who deserves to be contemned; and a holy man, he is the right honourable; (Psal. xv. 4.) "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord." The vile person is opposed to him that fears the Lord. He that is bold to affront God, and sin against him, is the base and ignoble person. God himself, who is possessed of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows best how to judge of these, he tells us how we should value ourselves and others; (Jer. ix. 23, 24.) "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." To know these Divine qualities and perfections, signifies here, to understand them so as to imitate them. I do not speak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to lessen the respect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued but wickedness and vice; and I would have those who have store of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add religion to their riches, and holiness to their honour, that they may be current for their intrinsic value, rather than for the image and picture of worth which the world hath stamped upon them.

3. If holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the Divine nature, then what an absurd and unreasonable thing is it to scorn and despise holiness, to mock and deride men under this very title! The world is much blinded, that they do not see the great evil of sin, and the beauty and excellency of holiness: but that men should be so infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to mistake things of so vast difference, as sin, and holiness; to call good evil, and evil good; that sin which is the vilest thing in the world, should be esteemed and cherished, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckoned amongst the excellences and accomplishments of human nature; and holiness, which is so great a perfection, should be a name of hatred and disgrace, to be contemned and persecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the most radiant perfection of the Divine nature, should be matter of scorn and contempt; as the apostle speaks in another case, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!" Do ye think the holy and just God will put up these affronts and indignities? Ye do not only despise men, but ye despise God also: you cannot contemn that which God accounts his glory, without reviling the Divine nature, and offering despite to God himself: the malice reacheth heaven, and is levelled against God, whenever ye slight holiness.

4. If God be a holy God, and hath such a repugnancy in his nature to sin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The holy God cannot but hate sin, and be an enemy to wickedness; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man; because where hatred is backed with power, the effects of it are terrible; but the hatred

of the almighty and eternal God is much more dreadful; because the effects of it are greater, and more lasting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmost they can do; they can but kill the body; after that, they have no more that they can do: they cannot hurt our souls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and pursue us into another world: but the effects of God's hatred and displeasure are mighty and lasting, they extend themselves to all eternity; for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmost of what Omnipotent Justice can do to sinners? "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;" because he that lives for ever, can punish for ever. We are miserable, if God do not love us. Those words, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him," signify great misery, and express a dreadful curse; but it is a more positive expression of misery, for God to hate us; that signifies ruin and destruction to the utmost; (Psal. v. 4.) "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee." This is a μείωσις, and expresseth less than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards sin and wickedness; therefore the Psalmist adds, "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity;" and then, in the next verse, to shew what is the effect of God's hatred, "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing." Therefore, sinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's holiness.

5. Imitate the holiness of God: this is the inference here in the text, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Holiness, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God; and when it is said, "Be

ye holy," it is as much as if he had said, Be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am so. Therefore religion is called "the knowledge of the Holy One," (Prov. ix. 10. and chap. xxx. 3.) And our imitation of God, is expressed by our "putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," (Eph. iv. 24.) Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of God, and the sum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform ourselves to the holy God; endeavour to be habitually holy, which is our conformity to the nature of God; and actually holy, which is our conformity to the will of God. I will not enlarge upon this, because I have pressed the imitation of these particular perfections, goodness, patience, justice, truth, and faithfulness, upon other texts. I shall only mention two arguments to excite and quicken our desires and endeavour after holiness.

1. Holiness is an imitation of the highest excellency and perfection. Holiness, I told you, signifies a separation from sin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and consequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the Divine nature, the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and justice, and veracity, and faithfulness of God; now these are the very beauty and glory of the Divine nature. The first thing that we attribute to God, next to his being, is his goodness, and those other attributes, which have a necessary connexion with it; for his greatness and majesty is nothing else but the glory which results from his united perfections, especially from his goodness, and those perfections which are akin to it. Separate from

God those perfections which holiness includes in it, and what would be left but an omnipotent evil, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do mischief? Which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impossible a thing, as can be imagined: so that if we have any sparks of ambition in us, we cannot but aspire after holiness, which is so great an excellency and perfection of God himself. There is a vulgar prejudice against holiness, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous spirit; whereas holiness is the only true greatness of mind, the most genuine nobility, and the highest gallantry of spirit; and however it be despised by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and Divine original. Holiness is the first part of the character of "the wisdom that is from above;" (Jam. iii. 17.) "The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

2. Holiness is an essential and principal ingredient of happiness. Holiness is a state of peace and tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of happiness; and without it, the Divine nature, as it would be imperfect, so it would be miserable. If the Divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injustice, or unfaithfulness, it would be liable to vexation and discontent, than which nothing can be a greater disturbance of happiness: so that holiness is necessary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the happiness of the next life, but to our present peace and contentment. If reasonable creatures could be happy, as brute beasts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and

following the dictates of sense and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a law and rule, but have left us, as he hath done unreasonable creatures, to satisfy our lusts and appetites, without check and control: but angels and men, which are reasonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of comeliness and filthiness, so woven and twisted in their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impossible that such creatures should be happy otherwise, than by complying with these notions, and obeying the natural dictates and suggestions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go against, they will naturally feel remorse and torment in their own spirits; their minds will be uneasy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and displeased with themselves for what they have done. So the apostle tells us, (Rom. i.) that even the most degenerate heathens had consciences, which did accuse or excuse them, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. God, therefore, who knows our frame, hath so adapted his law to us, which is the rule of holiness, that if we live up to it, we shall avoid the unspeakable torment of a guilty conscience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we shall always be at discord with ourselves, and in a perpetual disquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to the law of its being, that is, to its own nature, without displeasure and reluctancy; the consequence of which, in moral actions, is guilt; which is nothing else but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in one's mind, from consciousness of having done something that contradicts the perfective principle of his being; that is, something which did not

become him, and which, being what he is, that is a reasonable creature, he ought not to do.

So that in all reasonable creatures there is a certain kind of temper and disposition that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness; which, as it is the perfection, so it is the great felicity of the Divine nature: and, on the contrary, this is one chief part of the misery of those wicked and accursed spirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked; that is, of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself: and here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil disposition of our spirits; and till that be cured, which can only be done by holiness, it is as impossible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himself, as it is for a sick man to be at ease; and the external presence of God, and a local heaven, would signify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of music, and a well-spread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone. If a sensual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like the rich man in hell, he would be tormented with a continual thirst, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires, and would not meet with the least drop of suitable pleasure and delight to quench and allay the heat: the reason is, because such a man hath that within him which torments him, and he cannot be at ease till that be removed. Sin is the violent, and unnatural, and uneasy state of our soul; every wicked man's spirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by holiness, he will be perpetually disquieted,

and can have no rest within himself. The prophet fitly describes the condition of such a person: (Isa. lvii. 20, 21.) "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." So long as a man is unholy, so long as filthiness and corruption abound in his heart, they will be restlessly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itself of its dregs and foulness. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the spirit of a wicked man; it is like the sea, when it roars and rages through the strength of contrary winds; it is the scene of furious lusts, and wild passions, which as they are contrary to holiness, so they maintain perpetual contests and feuds among themselves.

All sin separates us from God, who is the foundation of our happiness. Our limited nature, and the narrowness of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in ourselves: it is peculiar to God to be his own happiness; but man, because he is finite, and therefore cannot be self-sufficient, is carried forth by an innate desire of happiness, to seek his felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a spring of restless motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himself, and tosses him to and fro, till he comes to rest in something that is self-sufficient. Our souls, when they are separated from God, like the unclean spirit in the gospel, when it was "cast out, wander up and down in dry and desert places, seeking rest, but finding none." Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the least attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of Divine vengeance, yet he could not be satisfied with himself; there is

something within him that would not let him be at rest, but would tear him from his own foundation and consistency; so that when we are once broken off from God, the sense of inward want doth stimulate and force us to seek our contentment elsewhere. So that nothing but holiness, which re-unites us to God, and restores our souls to their primitive and original state, can make us happy, and give peace and rest to our souls: and this is the constant voice and language of Scripture, and the tenour of the Bible; "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace," (Job xxii. 21.) "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," (Psal. xcvii. 11.) "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever," (Isa. xxxii. 17.)

Seeing then holiness is so high a perfection, and so great a happiness, let these arguments prevail with us to aspire after this temper, that "as He who hath called us is holy, so we may be holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy."

SERMON CXLII.*

[A Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church on Easter Tuesday, April 14, 1691.]

OF DOING GOOD.

Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not: as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.—GALAT. vi. 9, 10.

THE apostle, in these words, recommends unto us a great and comprehensive duty, the doing of good; concerning which, the text offers these five particulars to our consideration:

I. The nature of the duty itself, which is called well-doing, (ver. 9.) and doing good, (ver. 10.)

II. The extent of this duty in respect of its object, which is all mankind; "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

III. The measure of it, "As we have opportunity."

IV. Our unwearied perseverance in it: "Let us not be weary in well-doing."

V. The argument and encouragement to it; because "in due season we shall reap, if we faint

* Although the present position of the above Sermon seems to interrupt the regular series of those on the Attributes, it appeared nevertheless proper to preserve that arrangement, which had been adopted in former editions of the Author's works.

not: therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good," &c.

I. I will consider the nature of the duty itself of well-doing, and doing good. And this I shall explain to you as briefly as I can, by considering the extent of the act of doing good, and the excellency of it. And,

1. The extent of the act. It comprehends in it all those ways wherein we may be beneficial and useful to one another. It reaches not only to the bodies of men, but to their souls, that better and more excellent part of ourselves, and is conversant in all those ways and kinds whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote either his present, or his future and eternal happiness.

To instruct the ignorant, or reduce those that are engaged in any evil course, by good counsel, and seasonable admonition, and by prudent and kind reproof; to resolve and satisfy the doubting mind; to confirm the weak; to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort the melancholy and troubled spirits: these are the noblest ways of charity, because they are conversant about the souls of men, and tend to procure and promote their eternal felicity.

And then to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, release the imprisoned; to redeem the captives, and to vindicate those who are injured and oppressed in their persons, or estates, or reputation; to repair those who are ruined in their fortunes; and, in a word, to relieve and comfort those who are in any kind of calamity or distress.

All these are but the several branches and instances of this great duty here in the text, of doing good; though it hath, in this place, a more parti-

cular respect to the charitable supply of those who are in want and necessity; and, therefore, with a more particular regard to that, I shall discourse of it at this time. You see the extent of the duty: we will, in the

Second place, Briefly say something of the excellency of it; which will appear, if we consider that it is the imitation of the highest excellency and perfection. To do good, is to be like God, who is good, and doeth good; and it is to be like to him in that which he esteems his greatest glory: it is to be like the Son of God, who, when he was pleased to take our nature upon him, and live here below, and to dwell amongst us, "went about doing good." And it is to be like the blessed angels, the highest rank and order of God's creatures, whose great employment it is to be "ministering spirits, for the good of men." So that, for a man to be kind, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a Saviour, and a kind of God too.

It is an argument of a great, and noble, and generous mind, to extend our thoughts and cares to the concernments of others, and to employ our interest, and power, and endeavours for their benefit and advantage: whereas a low, and mean, and narrow spirit is contracted and shrivelled up within itself, and cares only for its own things, without any regard to the good and happiness of others.

It is the most noble work in the world; because that inclination of mind, which prompts us to do good, is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly greatness and pleasure, at last pitched upon this, as the great felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune: (Eccles. iii. 12.) "I know (says he, speak-

ing of riches) that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and to do good in his life." And, certainly, the best way to take joy in an estate, is to do good with it: and a greater and wiser than Solomon has said it, even He, who is the power and wisdom of God, has said it, that "it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive."

Consider further, that this is one of the great and substantial parts of religion, and next to the love and honour which we pay to Almighty God, the most acceptable service that we can do to him: it is one table of the law, and next to the "first and great commandment" of loving the Lord our God, and very like to it: "And the second is like unto it (says our Saviour), Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" like to it, in the excellency of it; and equal to it, in the necessary obligation of it." And this commandment (says St. John, 1 Epist. chap. iv. ver. 21.) have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also." The first commandment, indeed, excels in the dignity of the object, because it enjoins the love of God; but the second seems to have the advantage in the reality of its effects: for the love of God consists in our acknowledgment, and honour of him; but our "righteousness and goodness extend not to him;" we can do him no real benefit and advantage: but our love to men is really useful and beneficial to them; for which reason God is contented, in many cases, that the external honour and worship which he requires of us by his positive commands, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another: "I will have mercy (says God, in the prophet Amos), and not sacrifice."

And to shew how great a value God puts upon

this duty, he hath made it the very testimony of our love to himself; and for want of it, hath declared that he will reject all our other professions and testimonies of love to him, as false and insincere. "Whoso hath this world's good, (saith St. John, 1 Epist. chap. iii. ver. 17.) and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" And again, (chap. iv. ver. 20.) "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

You see the duty here recommended, both in the extent, and in the excellency of it; "Let us do good." I proceed to consider, in the

II. Second place, The extent of this duty, in respect of its object, which is all mankind, but more especially Christians, those that are of the same faith and religion; "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith." So that the object, about which this duty is conversant, is very large, and takes in all mankind; "Let us do good unto all men." The Jews confined their love and kindness to their own kindred and nation: and because they were prohibited familiarity with idolatrous nations, and were enjoined to maintain a perpetual enmity with Amalek, and the seven nations of Canaan, whom God had cast out before them, and devoted to ruin, they looked upon themselves as perfectly discharged from all obligation of kindness to the rest of mankind: and yet it is certain, that they were expressly enjoined by their law to be kind to strangers, because they themselves had been strangers in the land of Egypt. But our Saviour hath restored this law of love and charity

to its natural and original extent; and hath declared every one that is of the same nature with ourselves to be our neighbour and our brother, and that he is to be treated by us accordingly, whenever he stands in need of our kindness and help; and to shew that none are out of the compass of our charity, he hath expressly commanded us to extend it to those who, of all others, can least pretend to it, even our enemies and persecutors.

So that if the question be about the extent of our charity in general, these two things are plainly enjoined by the Christian religion:

1. Negatively, That we should not hate, nor bear ill-will to any man, nor do him any harm or mischief. "Love worketh no evil to his neighbour," saith the apostle, (Rom. xiii. 10.) And this negative charity every man may exercise towards all men, without exception, and that equally; because it does not signify any positive act, but only that we abstain from enmity and hatred, from injury and revenge, which it is in every man's power, by the grace of God, and the due care and government of himself, to do.

2. Positively, The law of charity requires that we should bear an universal good-will to all men, and wish every man's happiness, and pray for it, as sincerely as we wish and pray for our own; and if we be sincere in our wishes and prayers for the good of others, we shall be so in our endeavours to procure and promote it.

But the great difficulty is, as to the exercise of our charity, and the real expressions and effects of it, in doing good to others; which is the duty here meant in the text, and (as I told you before) does more particularly relate to the relief of those who

are in want and necessity. And the reason of the difficulty is, because no man can do good to all in this kind, if he would; it not being possible for any man to come to the knowledge of every man's necessity and distress; and if he could, no man's ability can possibly reach to the supply and the relief of all men's wants. And, indeed, this limitation the text gives to this duty; "As we have opportunity (says the apostle) let us do good unto all men;" which either signifies, as occasion is offered, or as we have ability of doing, or both, as I shall shew afterwards.

So that it being impossible to exercise this charity to all men that stand in need of it, it is necessary to make a difference, and to use prudence and discretion in the choice of the most fit and proper objects. We do not know the wants of all men, and therefore the bounds of our knowledge do of necessity limit our charity within a certain compass; and of those whom we do know, we can relieve but a small part, for want of ability: from whence it follows, that though a man were never so charitably disposed, yet he must of necessity set some rules to himself for the management of his charity to the best advantage. What those rules are cannot minutely and nicely be determined: when all is done, much must be left to every man's prudence and discretion, upon a full view and consideration of the case before him, and all the circumstances of it; but yet such general rules may be given as may serve for the direction of our practice in most cases; and for the rest, every man's prudence, as well as it can, must determine the matter. And the rules which I shall give, shall be these:

First, Cases of extremity ought to take the first

place, and do for that time challenge precedence of all other considerations. If a person be in great and present distress, and his necessity so urgent, that if he be not immediately relieved he must perish, this is so violent a case, and calls so loud for present help, that there is no resisting of it, whatever the person be; though a perfect stranger to us, though most unworthy, though the greatest enemy we have in the world, yet the greatness of his distress does so strongly plead for him, as to silence all considerations to the contrary; for, after all, he is a man, and is of the same nature with ourselves; and the consideration of humanity ought, for that time, to prevail over all objections against the man, and to prefer him to our charity before the nearest relation and friend, who is not in the like extremity. In other cases, we not only may, but ought to relieve our friends, and those that have deserved well of us, in the first place; but if our enemy be in extremity, then that Divine precept takes place, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink."

Secondly, In the next place, I think that the obligation of nature, and the nearness of relation, does challenge a preference; for there is all the reason in the world, if other things be equal, that we should consider and supply the necessity of those who are of our blood and kindred, and members of our family, before the necessity of strangers, and those who have no relation to us. There is a special duty incumbent upon us, and another obligation beside that of charity, to have a particular care and regard for them. In this case, not only Christianity, but nature, ties this duty upon us: (1 Tim. v. 8.) "If any man provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house," for them that are of his family,

" he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel;" that is, he doth not only offend against the law of Christianity, but against the very dictates of nature, which prevail even amongst infidels. And our Saviour has told us, that when our parents stand in need of relief, it is more acceptable to God to employ our estates that way, than to devote them to him and his immediate service; and that it is a kind of sacrilege to consecrate that to God, whereby our parents may be profited, and provided for in their necessity.

Thirdly, The obligation of kindness and benefits lays the next claim to our charity. If they fall into want who have obliged us by their former kindness and charity, both justice and charity do challenge from us a particular consideration of their case; and proportionably, if we ourselves have been obliged to their family, or to any other that are nearly related to them.

Fourthly, Those " who are of the household of faith," and of the same religion, and members of the same mystical body, and do partake of the same holy mysteries, the body and blood of our blessed Saviour, the strictest bond of love and charity; these fall under a very particular consideration in the exercise of our charity: and of this the apostle puts us in mind, in the last words of my text, " Let us do good unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith." God hath a special love and regard for such, and those whom God loves ought to be very dear to us.

And this, perhaps, was a consideration of the first rank, in those times when Christians lived among heathens, and were exposed to continual wants and sufferings; but it signifies much less now that Christ-

ianity is the general profession of a nation, and is too often made use of to very uncharitable purposes; to confine men's bounty and benefits to their own sect and party, as if they, and none but they, were "the household of faith;" a principle which I know not whether it has more of Judaism or of popery in it.

Fifthly, After these, the merit of the persons who are the objects of our charity, and all the circumstances belonging to them, are to be valued and considered; and we are accordingly to proportion our charity, and the degrees of it. I shall instance in some particulars, by which a prudent man may judge of the rest.

Those who labour in an honest calling, but yet are oppressed with their charge, or disabled for a time by sickness, or some other casualty: these, many a time, need as much, and certainly deserve much better, than common beggars; for these are useful members of the commonwealth; and we cannot place our charity better than upon those, who do what they can to support themselves.

Those, likewise, who are fallen from a rich and plentiful condition, without any fault or prodigality of their own, merely by the providence of God, or some general calamity; these are more especially objects of our charity and liberal relief.

And those also who have been charitable, and have liberally relieved others, when they were in condition to do it; or the children or near relations of those who were eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind, do deserve a particular regard in our charity. Mankind being (as I may say) bound in justice, and for the honour of God's providence, to make good his promise, to preserve such from extreme necessity.

And, lastly, Those whose visible wants, and great age and infirmities, do plead for more than ordinary pity, and do, at first sight, convince every one that sees them, that they do not beg out of laziness, but of necessity, and because they are not able to do any thing towards their own support and subsistence.

There are innumerable circumstances more, which it would be endless to reckon up; but these which I have mentioned are some of the chief; and by proportion to these, we may direct ourselves in other cases.

Sixthly, Those whom we certainly know to be true objects of charity, are to be considered by us before those who are strangers to us, and whose condition we do not know, yea though, in common charity, we do not disbelieve them; because, in reason and prudence, we are obliged to prefer those who are certainly known to us; since we find, by experience, that there are many cheats and counterfeit beggars who can tell a fair story, and carry about testimonials of their own making; and likewise, because we run the hazard of misplacing our charity, when there are objects enough besides, where we are sure we shall place it right: and charity misplaced, as it is in truth and reality no charity in itself, so it is hardly any in us, when we squander it so imprudently as to pass by a certain and real object, and give it those of whom we are not certain that they are true objects of charity. In this blind way a man may give all his goods to the poor, as he thinks, and yet do no real charity. And, therefore, unless we be able to relieve every one that asks, we must of necessity make a difference, and use our best prudence in the choice of the most proper objects of our charity.

And yet we ought not to observe this rule so strictly, as to shut out all whom we do not know, without exception: because their case, if it be true, may sometimes be much more pitiable, and of greater extremity, than the case of many whom we do know; and then it would be uncharitable to reject such, and to harden our hearts so far against them as utterly to disbelieve them; because it is no fault of theirs that we do not know them; their wants may be real notwithstanding that; especially, when their extremity seems great, we ought not to stand upon too rigorous a proof and evidence of it, but should accept of a fair probability.

Seventhly, Those who suffer for the cause of religion, and are stripped of all for the sake of it, ought to have a great precedence in our charity to most other cases. And this of late hath been and still is the case of many among us, who have fled hither for refuge, from the tyranny and cruelty of their persecutors, and have been, by a most extraordinary charity of the whole nation, more than once extended to them, most seasonably relieved; but especially by the bounty of this great city, whose liberality upon these occasions hath been beyond all example, and even all belief. And I have often thought that this very thing, next to the mercy and goodness of Almighty God, hath had a particular influence upon our preservation and deliverance from the terrible calamities which were just ready to break in upon us; and, were we not so stupidly insensible of this great deliverance which God hath wrought for us, and so horribly unthankful to him, and to the happy instruments of it, might still be a means to continue the favour of God to us. And what cause have we to thank God,

who hath allotted to us this more blessed and more merciful part, to give, and not to receive; to be free from persecution ourselves, that we might give refuge and relief to those that are persecuted!

III. We must consider the measure of our charity, ὁ καιρὸν ἔχομεν, which our translation renders, "as we have opportunity;" others, "as we have ability:" so that this expression may refer either to the occasions of our charity, or to the season of it, or to the proportion and degree of it.

1. It may refer to the occasions of our charity, "as we have opportunity let us do good;" that is, according as the occasions of doing good shall present themselves to us, so often as an opportunity is offered. And this is an argument of a very good and charitable disposition, gladly to lay hold of the occasions of doing good, as it were, to meet opportunities when they are coming towards us. This forwardness of mind in the work of charity the apostle commends in the Corinthians: (2 Cor. ix. 2.) "I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia:" and this he requires of all Christians, (Tit. iii. 8.) that they should "be ready to do every good work;" and (1 Tim. vi. 18.) that we be "ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Some are very ready to decline these opportunities, and to get out of the way of them; and when they thrust themselves upon them, and they cannot avoid them, they do what they do grudgingly, and not with a willing mind.

2. It may refer to the season of this duty, ὡς καιρὸν χομεν, "whilst we have time;" ὡς for ἕως, "whilst this life lasts;" so Grotius does understand and interpret this phrase: and then the apostle does hereby intimate to them the uncertainty of their lives, espe-

cially in those times of persecution. And this consideration holds in all times, in some degree, that our lives are short and uncertain; that it is but a little while that we can serve God in this kind; namely, while we are in this world, in this vale of misery and wants. In the next world there will be no occasion, no opportunity for it; we shall then have nothing to do but to reap the reward of the good we have done in this life, and to receive that blessed sentence from the mouth of the great Judge of the world: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world; for I was hungry, and ye gave me meat," &c. And, *Euge bone, serve!* "Well done, good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful in a little, and I will make thee ruler over much." God will then declare his bounty and goodness to us, and open those inexhaustible treasures of glory and happiness, which all good men shall partake of, in proportion to the good which they have done in this world. Or else,

3. (Which I take to be the most probable meaning of this phrase) It may refer to the degree of this duty, in proportion to our ability and estate; as we have ability, "let us do good unto all men." And this the phrase will bear, as learned men have observed; and it is very reasonable to take in this sense, at least as part of the meaning of it, either expressed or implied: for, without this, we cannot exercise charity, though there were never so many occasions for it; and then this precept will be of the same importance with that of the son of Sirach: (Ecclus. xxxv. 10.) "Give unto the Most High according as he hath enriched thee;" and with that counsel, (Tob. iv. 7.) "Give alms, ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων,

according to thy substance;" and (ver. 8.) "If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly." And this may be reasonably expected from us; for wherever his providence gives a man an estate, it is but in trust for certain uses and purposes, among which charity and alms is the chief: and we must be accountable to him, whether we have disposed it faithfully to the ends for which it was committed to us. It is an easy thing with him to level men's estates, and to give every man a competency; but he does on purpose suffer things to be distributed so unequally, to try and exercise the virtues of men in several ways; the faith and patience of the poor, the contentedness of those in a middle condition, the charity and bounty of the rich. And, in truth, wealth and riches; that is, an estate above what sufficeth our real occasions and necessities, is in no other sense a blessing, than as it is an opportunity put into our hands, by the providence of God, of doing more good; and if we do not faithfully employ it to this end, it is but a temptation and a snare; "and the rust of our silver and our gold will be a witness against us," and we do but "heap up treasures together against the last day."

But what proportion our charity ought to bear to our estates, I shall not undertake to determine: the circumstances of men have too much variety in them to admit of any certain rule; some may do well, and others may do better; every man as God hath put into his heart, and according to his belief of the recompense which shall be made "at the resurrection of the just." I shall only say, in general, that if there be first a free and willing mind, that will make a man charitable to his power; for "the liberal man will devise liberal things." And we

cannot propose a better pattern to ourselves in this kind than the King and Queen, who are, as they ought to be (but as it very seldom happens), the most bright and shining examples of this greatest of all graces and virtues—charity and compassion to the poor and persecuted. I proceed to the

IV. Fourth thing considerable in the text; viz. Our unwearied perseverance in this work of doing good: "Let us not be weary in well-doing." After we have done some few acts of charity, yea, though they should be very considerable, we must not sit down and say we have done enough: there will still be new objects, new occasions, new opportunities for the exercise of our charity, springing up and presenting themselves to us. Let us never think that we can do enough in the way of doing good. The best and the happiest beings are most constant and unwearied in this work of doing good. The holy angels of God are continually employed in ministering for the good of "those, who shall be heirs of salvation:" and the Son of God, when he appeared in our nature, and dwelt among us, that he might be a perfect and familiar example to us of all holiness and virtue, "he went about doing good" to the bodies and to the souls of men. How diligent and unwearied was he in this work! It was his employment and his pleasure, his meat and drink, the joy and the life of his life. And God himself, though he is infinitely and perfectly good in himself, yet he still continues to do good, and is never weary of this blessed work. It is the nature, and the perfection, and the felicity of God himself: and how can we be weary of that work, which is an imitation of the highest excellency and perfection, and the very essence of happiness?

V. And lastly, Here is the argument and encouragement to the cheerful discharge of this duty; "because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not; therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men. In due season we shall reap;" that is, sooner or later, in this world or in the other, we shall receive the full reward of our well-doing.

And now I have explained this duty to you, as plainly and briefly as I could, the hardest part of my task is yet behind—to persuade men to the practice of it: and, to this purpose, I shall only insist upon the promise in the text, "Be not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not." We shall reap the pleasure and satisfaction of it in our own minds, and all the other mighty advantages of it in this world, and the vast and unspeakable reward of it in the other.

First, We shall reap the pleasure and satisfaction of it in our own minds; and there is no sensual pleasure that is comparable to the delight of doing good. This Cato makes his boast of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age, *Conscientia bene actæ vitæ, multorumque benefactorum recordatio jucundissima.* The remembrance of a well-spent life, and of many benefits and kindnesses done by us to others, is one of the most pleasant things in the world. Sensual pleasures soon die and vanish: but that is not the worst of them, they leave a sting behind them; and when the pleasure is gone, nothing remains but guilt, and trouble, and repentance! Whereas the reflection upon any good we have done, is a perpetual spring of peace and pleasure to us, and no trouble and bitterness ensues upon it; the thoughts of it lie even and easy in our minds;

and so often as it comes to our remembrance, it ministers fresh comfort to us.

Secondly, We shall likewise reap other mighty advantages by it in this world. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing on our estates. What we give in alms and charity is consecrated to God, and is one of the chiefest and most acceptable sacrifices in the Christian religion: so the apostle tells us, (Heb. xiii. 16.) "To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." It is like the first-fruits under the law, which being dedicated and offered up to God, did derive a blessing upon their whole harvest.

And it procures for us also the blessing and prayers of those to whom we extend our charity; their blessing, I say, upon us and ours, and all that we have: and is it a small thing in our eye, to have (as Job speaks) the blessing of them who are ready to perish to come upon us? "The fervent prayer" of the poor for us "availeth much:" for God hath a special "regard to the prayers of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry."

Few men have faith to believe it, but certainly charity is a great security to us in the times of evil, and that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which is engaged to preserve those from want, who are ready to relieve the necessity of others: (Prov. xi. 25.) "the liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself." And (Prov. xxviii. 27.) "He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack. He shall not be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he shall be satisfied," says the Psalmist. But, besides the promise and providence of God, our charity and alms are likewise a great security to us,

from the nature and reason of the thing itself. Whosoever is charitable to others, does wisely bespeak the charity and kindness of others for himself against the day of necessity; for there is nothing that makes a man more and surer friends than our bounty; this will plead for us, and stand our friend in our greatest troubles and dangers; "for a good man," saith the apostle, that is, for one that is ready to oblige others by great kindnesses and benefits, "one would even dare to die." It has sometimes happened, that the obligation which a man hath laid upon others by a cheerful and seasonable charity, hath, in time of danger and extremity, done him more kindness than all his estate could do for him: "alms," saith the wise man, "hath delivered from death."

And in times of public distress, and when we are beset with cruel and powerful enemies, who, "if God were not on our side, would swallow us up quick," the public charity of a nation does, many times, prove its best safeguard and shield. There is a most remarkable passage to this purpose: (Ecclus. xxix. 11—13.) "Lay up thy treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction. It shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and a strong spear."

And of this I doubt not but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodness of Almighty God, have had happy experience in our late wonderful deliverance, under the conduct and valour of one of the best and bravest of princes, and to whom, by too many among us, the most unworthy and un-

thankful returns have been made, for the unwearied pains he hath undergone, and for the desperate hazards he hath exposed himself to for our sakes, that ever were made to so great and generous a benefactor; so great a benefactor, I say, not only to these nations, but to all Europe, in asserting and vindicating their liberties, against the insolent tyranny and pride of one of the greatest oppressors of mankind; of whom I may say, as Job does of the leviathan, (Job xli. 33, 34.) "Upon earth there is not his like: he beholdeth all high things; he is a king over all the children of pride."

And, beyond all this, the blessing of God does descend upon the posterity of those who are eminently charitable, and great benefactors to mankind. This David observes in his time; "I have been young (says he), and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread:" and what he means by the righteous man, he explains in the next words, "he is ever merciful, and lendeth."

I shall only add, upon this head, that the practice of this virtue will be one of our best comforts at the hour of death, and that we shall then look back upon all the good we have done in our life with the greatest contentment and joy imaginable. Xenophon, in his Cyrus, which he designed for the perfect idea of a good prince, represents him, in the last minutes of his life, addressing himself to God to this purpose: "Thou knowest that I have been a lover of mankind; and now that I am leaving this world, I hope to find that mercy from thee, which I have shewed to others." These words, that excellent heathen historian thought fit to come from the mouth of so excellent a prince as he had described

him, just as he was leaving the world; by which we may see what the light of nature thought to be the best comfort of a dying man. This brings me to the

Third and last particular which I mentioned, The vast and unspeakable reward which this grace and virtue of charity will meet with in the other world. It will plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us a most glorious "recompence at the resurrection of the just," and that proportionable to the degrees of our charity: (2 Cor. ix. 6.) "He which soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully." And from this consideration, the apostle encourageth our perseverance in well-doing; "Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not;" that is, we shall certainly meet with the reward of it, if not in this world, yet in the other.

And now that I have declared this duty to you, together with the mighty pleasure, and advantages, and rewards of it, I crave leave to present you with some of the best occasions and opportunities of the exercise and practice of it: and, for your encouragement hereto, I shall read to you the present state of the chief hospitals belonging to this great city, and of the disposal of their charity for the last year.

And now I have laid before you these great objects of your charity, and the best arguments I could think of to incline and stir up your minds to the exercise of this excellent grace and virtue; as there is no time left for it, I having, I am afraid, already tired your patience, so, I hope, there is no need to press this duty any further upon you, since you are so willing and forward of yourselves, and so very ready to every good work. This great city hath a

double honour due to it, of being both the greatest benefactors in this kind, and the most faithful managers and disposers of it; and I am now in a place most proper for the mention of Christ's Hospital, a protestant foundation of that most pious and excellent prince Edward VI. which, I believe, is one of the best instances of so large and so well-managed a charity this day in the world.

And now, to conclude all: if any of you know any better employment than to do good; any work that will give truer pleasure to our minds; that hath greater and better promises made to it, "the promises of the life that now is, and that which is to come;" that we shall reflect upon with more comfort, when we come to die; and that, through the mercies and merits of our blessed Saviour, will stand us in more stead at the day of judgment; let us mind that work: but, if we do not, let us apply ourselves to this business of charity with all our might, and "let us not be weary in well-doing, because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

"Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, through Jesus Christ; to whom, with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever." Amen.

SERMON CXLIII.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.—PSAL. cxlv. 9.

THE subject which I have now proposed to treat of, is certainly one of the greatest and noblest arguments in the world—the goodness of God; the highest and most glorious perfection of the best and most excellent of beings, than which nothing deserves more to be considered by us, nor ought, in reason, to affect us more. The goodness of God, is the cause and the continuance of our beings, the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of our happiness, our greatest comfort, and our fairest example, the chief object of our love, and praise, and admiration, the joy and rejoicing of our hearts; and therefore the meditation and discourse of it must needs be pleasant and delightful to us: the great difficulty will be, to confine ourselves upon so copious an argument, and to set bounds to that which is of so vast an extent; "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

Which words are an argument, which the divine Psalmist useth, to stir up himself and others to the praise of God: at the 3d verse he tells us, that "the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised;" and he gives the reason of this, (ver. 8, 9.) from those properties and perfections of the Divine nature, which declare his goodness; "The Lord is gracious, and

full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy: the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works:" where you have the goodness of God declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in respect of the objects of it: "The Lord is good to all."

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these four things:

First, Consider what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, Shew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the effects and the extent of it.

Fourthly, Answer some objections which may seem to contradict and bring in question the goodness of God.

First, What is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to God.

There is a dry metaphysical notion of goodness which only signifies the being and essential properties of a thing; but this is a good word ill bestowed; for, in this sense, every thing that hath being, even the devil himself, is good.

And there is a moral notion of goodness; and that is twofold:

1. More general, in opposition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call sin and vice; and so the justice, and truth, and holiness of God, are in this sense his goodness. But there is,

2. Another notion of moral goodness, which is more particular and restrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue, in opposition to a particular vice; and this is the proper and usual acceptation of the word goodness; and the best description I can give of it is this, that it is a certain propen-

sion and disposition of mind, whereby a person is inclined to desire and procure the happiness of others; and it is best understood by its contrary, which is an envious disposition, a contracted and narrow spirit, which would confine happiness to itself, and grudgeth that others should partake of it, or share in it; or a malicious and mischievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and mischief to them. To communicate and lay out ourselves for the good of others, is goodness; and so the apostle explains doing good, by communicating to others, who are in misery, or want: (Heb. xiii. 16.) "But to do good, and to communicate, forget not." The Jews made a distinction between a righteous and a good man; to which the apostle alludes, (Rom. v. 7.) "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die." The righteous man was he that did no wrong to others; and the good man he who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that goodness is a readiness and disposition to communicate the good and happiness which we enjoy, and to be willing others should partake of it.

This is the notion of goodness among men; and it is the same in God, only with this difference, that God is originally and transcendently good: but the creatures are, the best of them, but imperfectly good, and, by derivation from God, who is the fountain and original of goodness? which is the meaning of our Saviour, (Luke xviii. 19.) when he says, "There is none good, save one, that is God." But though the degrees of goodness in God and the creatures be infinitely unequal, and that goodness which is in us be so small and inconsiderable, that,

compared with the goodness of God, it does not deserve that name; yet the essential notion of goodness in both must be the same; else, when the Scripture speaks of the goodness of God, we could not know the meaning of it; and if we do not at all understand what it is for God to be good, it is all one to us (for aught we know) whether he be good or not; for he may be so, and we never the better for it; if we do not know what goodness in God is, and consequently when he is so, and when not.

Besides that, the goodness of God is very frequently in Scripture propounded to our imitation; but it is impossible for us to imitate that, which we do not understand what it is: from whence it is certain, that the goodness which we are to endeavour after is the same that is in God; because in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of God; that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according to the rate and condition of creatures, and so far as we, whose natures are imperfect, are capable of resembling the Divine goodness.

Thus much for the notion of goodness in God; it is a propension and disposition in the Divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, in the next place, that this perfection of goodness belongs to God; and that from these three heads:

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the testimony of Scripture and Divine revelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the Divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. The generality of the heathen agree in it, and there is hardly any perfection of God more universally acknowledged by them. I always except the sect

of the Epicureans, who attribute nothing but eternity and happiness to the Divine nature; and yet if they would have considered it, happiness without goodness is impossible. I do not find that they do expressly deny this perfection to God, or that they ascribe to him the contrary; but they clearly take away all the evidence and arguments of the Divine goodness; for they supposed God to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himself, and had no regard to any thing without himself, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himself in the happiness or misery of any of them; so that their notion of a Deity was, in truth, the proper notion of an idle being, that is called God, and neither does good nor evil.

But, setting aside this atheistical sect, the rest of the heathens did unanimously affirm and believe the goodness of God; and this was the great foundation of their religion; and all their prayers to God, and praises of him, did necessarily suppose a persuasion of the Divine goodness. Whosoever prays to God, must have a persuasion or good hopes of his readiness to do him good; and to praise God, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. Seneca hath an excellent passage to this purpose; "He (says he) that denies the goodness of God, does not, surely, consider the infinite number of prayers that, with hands lifted up to heaven, are put up to God, both in private and public, which certainly would not be; nor is it credible, that all mankind should conspire in this madness of putting up their supplications to deaf and impotent deities, if they did not believe that the gods were so good as to confer benefits upon those who prayed to them."

But we need not infer their belief of God's goodness from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them than expressly to attribute this perfection of goodness to him; and, among the Divine titles, this always had the pre-eminence, both among the Greeks and Romans; ἐὺς τε μέγας τε, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their constant style; and in our language the name of God seems to have been given him from his goodness. I might produce innumerable passages out of the heathen authors to this purpose, but I shall only mention that remarkable one out of Seneca; *Primus deorum cultus est deos credere; deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas:* "The first act of worship is to believe the being of God; and the next to ascribe majesty or greatness to him; and to ascribe goodness, without which there can be no greatness."

II. From the testimony of Scripture and Divine revelation. I shall mention but a few of those many texts of Scripture, which declare to us the goodness of God, (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) where God makes his name known to Moses; "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." (Psal. lxxxvi. 5.) "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive." (Psal. cxix. 68.) "Thou art good, and dost good." And that which is so often repeated in the Book of Psalms; "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever." Our blessed Saviour attributes this perfection to God, in so peculiar and transcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable: (Luke xviii. 19.) "There is none good, save one, that is God." The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent

and transcendent degree, in which the Divine nature is possessed of it.

To the same purpose are those innumerable testimonies of Scripture which declare God to be gracious, and merciful, and long-suffering; for these are but several branches of his goodness: his grace is the freeness of his goodness to those who have not deserved it: his mercy is his goodness to those who are in misery: his patience is his goodness to those who are guilty, in deferring the punishment due to them.

III. The goodness of God may likewise be argued from the perfection of the Divine nature, these two ways:

1. Goodness is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to God.

2. There are some footsteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in God.

1. Goodness is the highest perfection, and therefore it must needs belong to God, who is the most perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections; but separated from goodness, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree; but yet, for all that, be a devil. Goodness is so great and necessary a perfection, that, without it, there can be no other; it gives perfection to all other excellencies: take away this, and the greatest excellencies in any other kind would be but the greatest imperfections; and therefore our Saviour speaks of the goodness and mercy of God, as the sum of his perfections; what one evangelist hath, "Be ye merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful," is rendered in another, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father

which is in heaven is perfect." Goodness is so essential to a perfect being, that if we once strip God of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections; and therefore, when Moses desired to see God's glory, he said, he would make all his goodness to pass before him, (Exod. xxxiii. 19.) This is the most amiable perfection; and, as it were, the beauty of the Divine nature: (Zech. ix. 17.) "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" *Sine bonitate nulla majestas;* "without goodness, there can be no majesty." Other excellencies may cause fear and amazement in us; but nothing but goodness can command sincere love and veneration.

2. There are some footsteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it must be much more eminently in God. There is in every creature some representation of some Divine perfection or other; but God doth not own any creature to be after his image, that is destitute of goodness. The creatures that want reason and understanding are incapable of this moral goodness we are speaking of; man is the first in the rank of creatures that is endowed with it, and he is said to be "made after the image of God, and to have dominion given him over the creatures below him;" to signify to us, that if man had not been made after God's image, in respect of goodness, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures: because, without goodness, dominion would be tyranny and oppression; and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodness, the more it resembles God; as the blessed angels, who behold the face of God continually, and are thereby "transformed into his image, from glory to glory;" their whole business and employment is, to do

good; and the devil, though he resembles God in other perfections, of knowledge and power, yet, because he is evil, and envious, and mischievous, and so contrary to God in this perfection, he is the most opposite and hateful to him of all creatures whatsoever.

And if this perfection be in some degree in the creature, it is much more in God; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently possessed of it himself. All that goodness which is in the best-natured of the sons of men, or in the most glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak representation of the Divine goodness.

The third thing I proposed to consider, was, the effects of the Divine goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of the objects of it: "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works;" "Thou art good, and doest good," says David, (Psal. cxix. 68.) The great evidence and demonstration of God's goodness, is from the effects of it. To the same purpose St. Paul speaks: (Acts xiv. 17.) "He hath not left himself without witness in that he doeth good, and sends us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons."

I shall consider the effects of the Divine goodness, under these two heads:

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all his creatures.

II. I shall consider more particularly the goodness of God to men, which we are more especially concerned to take notice of.

I. The universal extent of his goodness to the whole creation; "The Lord is good to all." The whole creation furnisheth us with clear evidences and demonstrations of the Divine goodness; which way soever we cast our eyes, we are encountered with undeniable instances of the goodness of God;

and every thing that we behold is a sensible demonstration of it; "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work," says the Psalmist, (Psal. xix. 1.) And again, (Psal. xxxiii. 5.) "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." The whole frame of this world, and every creature in it, and all the several degrees of being and perfection, which are in the creatures, and the providence of God towards them all, in the preservation of them, and providing for the happiness of all of them in such degrees as they are capable of it, are a plentiful demonstration of the Divine goodness; which I shall endeavour to illustrate in these four particulars:

1. The universal goodness of God appears, in giving being to so many creatures.

2. In making them all so very good; considering the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

1. The extent of God's goodness appears, in giving being to so many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodness, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not God been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himself, and been unwilling that any thing besides himself should have been; but his goodness prompted him to spread and diffuse himself, and set his power and wisdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures which we see and know to be in the world, and, probably, to infinitely more than we have the knowledge of. Now, it is not imaginable that God could have any other motive to do this,

but purely the goodness of his nature. All the motives imaginable, besides this, must either be indigency and want, or constraint and necessity; but neither of these can have any place in God; and therefore it was mere goodness that moved him to give being to other things; and therefore all creatures have reason, with the four and twenty elders in the Revelations, to "cast their crowns before the throne of God, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure (that is, of mere goodness) they are and were created."

(1.) Indigency and want can have no place in God; because he that hath all possible perfection, hath all plenty in himself; from whence results all-sufficiency, and complete happiness. So that the Divine nature need not look out of itself for happiness, being incapable of any addition to the happiness and perfection it is already possessed of: *Ipse suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri.* We make things for our use, houses to shelter us, and clothes to keep us warm; and we propagate our kind, to perpetuate ourselves in our posterity: but all this supposeth imperfection, and want, and mortality; to none of which the Divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory which made God to make the world. It is true, indeed, the glory of God's goodness doth herein appear; and creatures endowed with understanding have reason to take notice of it with thankfulness, praise, and admiration: but there is no happiness redounds to God from it, nor does he feed himself with any imaginary content and satisfaction, such as vain-glorious persons have, from the fluttering applause of their creatures and beneficiaries. God is really

" above all blessing and praise." It is great condescension and goodness in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praises, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to sully his great and glorious name, by taking it into our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happiness to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happiness and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and, were it not for his goodness, might despise the praises of his creatures, with infinitely more reason than wise men do the applause of fools. There is, indeed, one text of Scripture which seems to intimate that God made all creatures for himself, as if he had some need of them: (Prov. xvi. 4.) " The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Now, if by God's making " all things for himself," be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifestation of his wisdom, and power, and goodness, in the creation of the world, it is most true that, in this sense, he " made all things for himself:" but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of his nature did not move him thereto, but he had some design to serve ends and necessities of his own upon his creatures, this is far from him. But it is very probable, that neither of these are the meaning of this text, which may be rendered, with much better sense, and nearer to the Hebrew, thus: " God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil;" that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can necessity and constraint have any place in God. When there was no creature yet made, nothing in being but God himself, there could be nothing to compel him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty: neither are the creatures necessary effects and emanations from the being of God, flowing from the Divine essence, as water doth from a spring, and as light streams from the sun: if so, this, indeed, would have been an argument of the fulness of the Divine nature, but not of the bounty and goodness of it; and it would have been matter of joy to us that we are, but not a true ground of thankfulness from us to God; as we rejoice and are glad that the sun shines, but we do not give it any thanks for shining, because it shines without any intention or design to do us good; it doth not know that we are the better for its light, nor did intend we should be, and therefore we have no reason to acknowledge its goodness to us.

But God, who is a Spirit, endowed with knowledge and understanding, does not act as natural and material causes do, which act necessarily and ignorantly; whereas he acts knowingly and voluntarily, with particular intention and design, knowing that he does good, and intending to do so freely, and out of choice, and when he hath no other constraint upon him but this, that his goodness inclines his will to communicate himself and to do good: so that the Divine nature is under no necessity, but such as is consistent with the most perfect liberty, and freest choice.

Not but that goodness is essential to God, and a necessary perfection of his nature, and he cannot possibly be otherwise than good: but when he com-

municates his goodness, he knows what he does, and wills and chooseth to do so.

And this kind of necessity is so far from being any impeachment of the Divine goodness, that it is the great perfection and praise of it. The Stoic philosophers mistaking this, do blasphemously advance their wise and virtuous man above God himself; for they reason thus; "A wise man is good out of choice, when he may be otherwise; but God, out of necessity of nature, and when he cannot possibly be otherwise than good." But if they had considered things aright, they might have known that this is an imperfection in their wise man, that he can be otherwise than good; for a power to be evil, is impotency and weakness. The highest character that ever was given of a man, is that which Velleius Paterculus gives of Cato, that he was *Vir bonus, quia aliter esse non potuit;* "A good man, because he could not be otherwise:" this, applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it signifies thus much, that it is the highest perfection, not to be able to be otherwise than good; and this is the perfection of the Divine nature, that goodness is essential to it: but the expressions and communications of his goodness are spontaneous and free, designed and directed by infinite knowledge and wisdom.

This is the first. The second particular is, That God hath made all creatures very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I shall reserve to another opportunity.

END OF VOL. VI.

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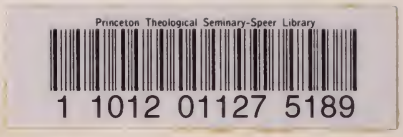
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